Nur's wife fears for rebel leader's life

STORY ON PAGE A2

Brrr! Baguio chills as temperature falls

BY GOBLETH MOULIC
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—On Christmas Day, tourists and residents relished what was probably their best holiday in the Pines City in years when the mercury dropped to 9.6 degrees Celsius for the second time in a month.

BRRR!/ A12

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2001 ★ 32 PAGES 3 SECTIONS VOL.17 NO. 19 ₱15

Lacson cases pushed despite Ador ouster

BY MARTIN P. MARFIL, MICHAEL LIM UBAC AND CYNTHIA D. BALANA

THE CASES against Sen. Panfilo Lacson will not be dropped even if Angelo "Ador" Mawanay is booted out of the Witness Protection Program (WPP), Col. Victor Corpus said yesterday.

Corpus, who heads the Intelligence Service

LACSON/ A11

Palace convinced Ramos won't run

But solon says: Watch out for body language

BY CARLITO PABLO, CYNTHIA BALANA AND JULIET JAVELLANA

TAKING him at his word, Malacañang yesterday said it was convinced that former President Fidel Ramos had no plans to run for the presidency again.

Besides, presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said, there are constitutional issues that may bar the country's 12th Chief Executive from seeking another term.

"He himself said he will not run and (also) there are constitutional barriers, questions that would not allow him," Tiglao said.

But another former general turned high elected official said he could not yet take Ramos' denial at face value.

Sen. Rodolfo Biazon said the body language, statements and increased public visibility of the former President belied his denial that he was not seeking the post anew.

Tiglao said, "we are very convinced that former President Ramos is very happy with his role in helping our government with his foundation." The former President heads the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation or RPDEV.

Just the same, President Macapagal-Arroyo is scheduled to play golf in Baguio City today with Ramos and Speaker Jose de Venecia.

But De Venecia merely laughed when asked if the three would discuss Ramos' rumored reelection

PALACE/ A12

GIVE ME FIVE

VAL HANDUMON

These Aeta children in Marilao, Bulacan, seem to be saying. Since the 1991 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, displaced mountain folk have been coming down every Christmas to ask for donations from passing motorists.

$3-M civil case filed vs Ping in California

BY CHRISTINE HERRERA

A FILIPINO-AMERICAN has filed a $3-million civil case against Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson Jr. before a court in the US state of California in connection with 41,297 handcuffs ordered by the Philippine National Police five years ago.

Blanquita Pelaez filed a "verified complaint for damages for intentional interference with economic relationship, for slander per se, (and) for intentional infliction of emotional distress" against Lacson and 30 John Does on Dec. 14.

She asked for $3 million in damages.

Col. Victor Corpus, chief of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, welcomed the suit, saying the case could help in "uncovering" Lacson's alleged US accounts.

But Lacson yesterday said he was unfazed. Admitting that filing the case was a prerogative of Pelaez's, he said the complainant was barking up the wrong tree because the deal was never consummated during his stint as PNP chief.

He stressed that the deal was entered into between his predecessor, Deputy Director General Roberto Lastimoso, and Pelaez.

The case, filed before the Superior Court of California in Alameda County and docketed as Case No. 2001-034470, stemmed from the nonpayment of handcuffs ordered on Dec. 27, 1996 by the PNP from Smith and Wesson Co., for which Pelaez was the exclusive supplier.

$3-M CIVIL/ A11

GMA assessment of 2001: Not bad at all

BY YOLANDA FUERTES
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

DAGUPAN CITY—Not bad at all.

This was President Macapagal-Arroyo's assessment of her first year in power that saw the ouster of Joseph Estrada from the presidency, a worsening peace and order situation and a worldwide recession aggravated by the Sept. 11 attacks on America.

"We faced many challenges," the President told reporters here yesterday when she made a 30-minute stopover on her way to Baguio City.

"First, it was full of trials from those who could not accept that they were no longer in power. Second, because of the world economic slowdown, and third, because of the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States," she said.

Ms Macapagal said, "it would be foolish to call it a good year" despite her administration's economic achievements.

She cited the 3.7-percent growth in the gross national product, a remarkable feat considering that the country's neighbors, like Singapore, had slumped into recession.

The President said the greatest challenge that Filipinos faced was

GMA/ A12

'NO. 64' AND COMPANY

Dogs seek 'foster parents'

MAN'S BEST FRIEND, a dog up for adoption at the Marikina City pound looks the part.

ERNIE SARMIENTO

BY MARLET D. SALAZAR

BITOY chews on his share of the *noche buena*, savoring every luscious piece.

After a while he lays his plump body in a cozy bed. It's a cold night, and he curls around his pillow dreaming happy dreams and certain of another good meal tomorrow.

This is the life of Bitoy, a 2-year-old white mongrel whose human owner loves him.

But not all dogs live a life as comfortable as Bitoy's. In Metro Manila alone, thousands are out in the streets rummaging through the garbage to find scraps that will tide them over another day. A number spent Christmas in dog pounds.

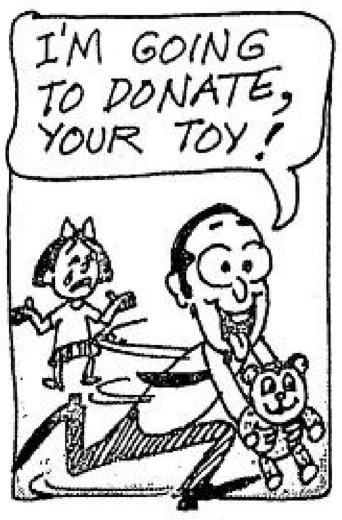
At the Marikina City Animal Protection and Control Office, more than 50 dogs and puppies are languishing. Most of them are "*askal*" (for "*asong kalye*," literally meaning "street dogs"), but a few appear to be of mixed breed. At least two seem to be purebred.

These dogs were caught and taken off the streets in keeping with a city ordinance. Judging from their collars, they had human owners. Yet no one has come to claim them.

A few of the dogs keep barking at the sight of strangers, but most of them are listless and afraid. Many are afflicted with depression and trauma.

Others have become so de-

DOGS/ A11



I'M GOING TO DONATE, YOUR TOY!

Strippers also show heart

TAMPA, Florida—Call them strippers with a heart.

A group of strippers banded together in a club here and flashed their breasts to get toy donations this Christmas for needy families.

The strippers received more than 1,000 gifts and turned them over to a large local church that distributes new toys and food every year to families in need.

Church officials didn't know what to do after learning on Friday how the gifts were collected.

A disc jockey had promised them a truckload of toys but they didn't know he had told listeners they could get a sneak peek if they brought their donations to the Deja Vu strip club.

After talking it over, church leaders agreed it was best to pass out the gifts as planned, said Jennifer Mallan, a spokesperson for Without Walls International Church.

"We do not condone the way that they were collected,

STRIPPERS/ A11

Reds to resume peace talks

Joma claims communist movement growing

THE FOUNDER of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) yesterday said his group would resume peace talks with the government next month.

Speaking by telephone from his exile in Utrecht, the Netherlands, Jose Maria Sison told radio station dzBB in Manila that some agreements "are to be approved and signed by both (negotiating) panels. That will be done in formal talks to be carried out in January."

In another interview with dxMF Bombo Radyo based in Davao City, Sison said the communist movement was becoming stronger, belying military claims that it was bound for extinction.

Sison made his comments as government soldiers raided a suspected communist rebel safe house in Bukidnon. Authorities denied the action was a violation of a ceasefire called by both sides.

President Macapagal-Arroyo suspended negotiations with the Communists in June after the CPP's military wing, the New People's Army (NPA), killed two members of Congress.

Asked to comment about the Communists' declaration that talks would resume soon, presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said the government was hopeful.

"We're very keen to start the peace talks again, and the (government) negotiating panel is in constant touch with Sison's panel," Tiglao said.

Sison did not specify when or where the next round of peace talks would be held or what accords would be signed.

In a statement released yesterday by Armando Liwanag, CPP Central Committee chair and believed to be Sison's guerrilla name, the party warned that it would pull out from the talks if the government was unwilling to convene a joint monitoring committee.

The body will ensure the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human

REDS/ A12

Second FRONT PAGE

HINDI NAMAN SIGURO...

Wife fears Nur is dead

KUALA LUMPUR—The wife of Filipino Muslim rebel leader Nur Misuari said Wednesday she feared her husband may have died while being held by Malaysian authorities.

Tarhata Misuari, 27, is in Malaysia with their three children seeking a visit with her detained husband but Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has not yet given the green light for the reunion.

"I have not heard from him since the middle of last month. I want to make sure he is still alive," Tarhata, holding back tears and embracing their three children, said from a hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

"It is possible he may be dead and that is why they are not letting anyone meet him."

Misuari, 60, was arrested on Nov. 24 off an island in Malaysia's Sabah state after launching a short-lived rebellion in Jolo.

The failed uprising was a futile attempt to derail elections that ended his five-year hold on the governorship of a Muslim self-rule region.

Mahathir said on Monday Malaysian authorities were considering allowing Misuari's family to visit him. Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar has previously given assurances that Malaysia would treat Misuari with respect and dignity.

Malaysia has repeatedly said it wants to deport Misuari as soon as possible, partly because it does not want to be tainted with any connection to what could be seen as Islamic terrorism.

But Tarhata appealed to Mahathir and President Macapagal-Arroyo to grant her husband a safe passage to a third country, saying she feared for his life if he was deported back home.

"I plea to Mahathir and President Gloria Arroyo to grant Misuari asylum in a third country," she said.

Ms Macapagal last week rejected an appeal from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for Misuari to be given sanctuary in a third country and instead vowed to put him on trial for rebellion.

Misuari is the former leader of the Muslim separatist group, the Moro National Liberation Front, which is recognized by the world Islamic body.

Tarhata said the couple's children, aged 8 months, 4 years and 7 years, had not seen their father since Nov. 16 and they desperately wanted to visit him.

"The children are crying every day wanting to meet their father. Khalid is getting up middle of the night asking for his father. I just tell them their father has gone for a long meeting," she said.

Tarhata described Misuari as a responsible leader and loving husband and father.

"He is kind and tolerant but he spoils the children."

Elly Pamatong, a US-based lawyer who claims he represents Misuari also urged Mahathir to ensure the rebel leader was not placed in any danger, which he could be if sent back to the Philippines.

"It is a duty of a Muslim to protect his Muslim brother," Pamatong said.

"Do not make all his children orphans at this tender age."

Misuari has another six children from his first marriage.

Pamatong described Misuari as a crusader for independence, adding that he was trained by Malaysia in the 1970s.

"I have faith that the trainer (Malaysia) did not do so to make him a terrorist but to set his Muslim brothers free," he added.

Malaysia also provided sanctuary to the MNLF, which pushed for an independent Muslim homeland in the predominantly Catholic Philippines, in the 1970s and '80s. *AFP*

DIFF'RENT STROKES EDWIN BACASMAS

President Macapagal-Arroyo and the First Gentleman, Mike Arroyo, display different putting strokes on the green during a round of golf at the Camp John Hay golf club course in Baguio City a day after Christmas. The First Family is spending the rest of the holidays in Baguio before they return to Metro Manila for the New Year.

Lake Lanao yields bodies of two missing soldiers

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Military investigators are still trying to identify the killers of at least two soldiers, whose bodies were found floating in Lake Lanao on Dec. 23.

Maj. Johnny Macanas, spokesperson of the Army's 4th Infantry Division said the military based in Camp Ranao in Marawi City is investigating the death of Sgt. Alberto Barroa and Cpl. Claode Campomanes.

Macanas said, as of press time, no suspects were identified yet, although several angles were being considered. He declined to elaborate. The two soldiers were reported missing four days earlier.

The bodies of Barroa and Campomanes, both plainclothes Army men assigned at the 10th Field Artillery Battalion in Marawi City, were fished out of a spillway at the Agus II power plant in Saguiaran town.

The bodies bore multiple gunshot and stab wounds.

Macanas said it was possible that the soldiers were killed elsewhere and not in the area where their bodies were found.

"It was possible that the cadavers were carried by the current to the spillway. We still don't know. We are still investigating," Macanas said. ***Butch D. Enerio, PDI Mindanao Bureau***

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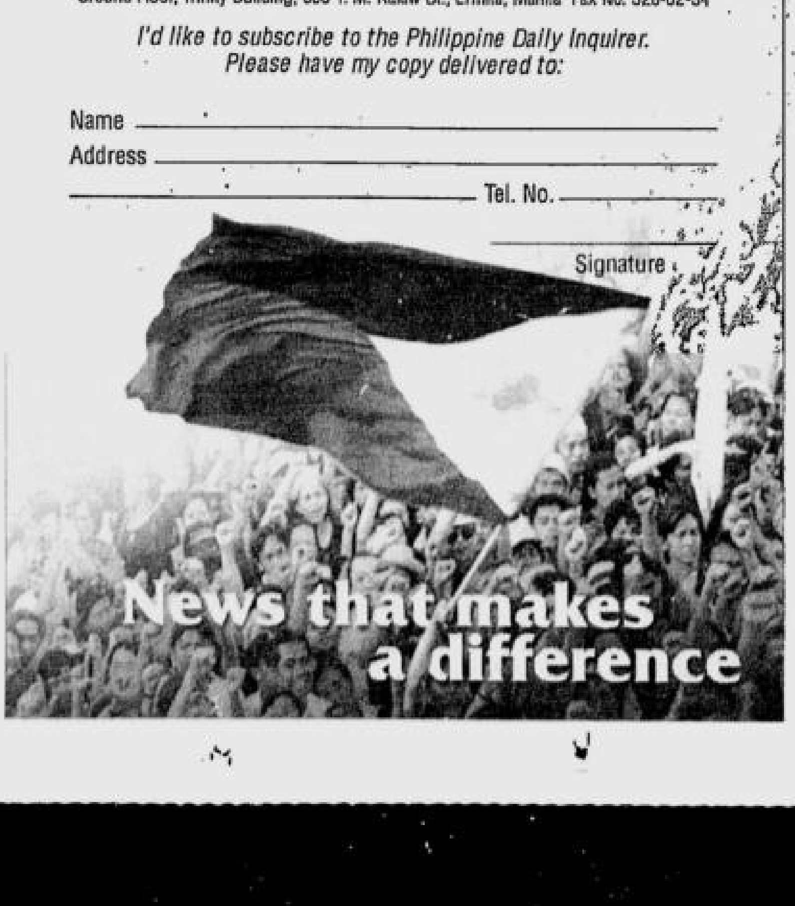

News that makes a difference

Troops working overtime to free Abu hostages

ARMY Scout Rangers have been operating deep in the jungles in a bid to rescue an American couple and a Filipina nurse held by Abu Sayyaf gunmen in Basilan before the year's end, President Macapagal-Arroyo's spokesperson said yesterday.

The soldiers have "constricted a certain area" in Basilan's hinterlands where the Abu Sayyaf gunmen are believed to be hiding Christian missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham and Deborah Yap, presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said.

"The military is doing their best. The rangers have not returned to base for as long as a month now and supplies are just being dropped," Tiglao told reporters.

While Ms Macapagal is hopeful the hostages would be rescued in time for New Year, Tiglao said that "this is a military operation and we can't really expect that everything is under control."

He said thick vegetation was helping the rebels escape from the nearly 5,000 soldiers scouring the area.

Government militia "blocking forces" were also aiding the soldiers in their hunt for the Abu Sayyaf, which both the Philippines and US governments have linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

The three hostages are the last from among scores of hostages the Abu Sayyaf seized this year. The gunmen had earlier beheaded a third American, Guillermo Sobero of California and more than a dozen Filipino hostages.

Tiglao's comments comes after the military failed to meet a self-imposed Christmas deadline to free the hostages, who have been in captivity for nearly seven months.

Apart from the Burnhams and Yap, an Italian missionary is separately being held by another group of Muslim gunmen elsewhere in Mindanao. *AFP*

Joe de V admits budget is biased vs Mindanao, but…

By Juliet L. Javellana

THERE'S some basis to Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr.'s accusation that the national budget is biased against Mindanao, Speaker Jose de Venecia admitted yesterday.

"There is some basis if you consider public funds, but the combination of public and private funds would make it adequate not only for Muslim Mindanao but also for Christian Mindanao and Lumad Mindanao," De Venecia said.

De Venecia said the Official Development Assistance and other multilateral funds being poured on Mindanao are big compared to the two other major islands in the country.

De Venecia said Congress even increased the budget of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao by P790 million, raising its budget for next year to P5.1 billion.

He said most of the funds are for capital outlay and infrastructure.

He said the budget increase would help jumpstart the leadership of Parouk Hussin, who was elected new governor of the ARMM.

De Venecia said he had proposed a "combination" of funding schemes to finance the mini-Marshall plan for Mindanao.

He said this includes tapping the ODA with Congress providing the counterpart fund, having infrastructure projects on a build-operate-transfer scheme, tapping investments from neighboring Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, as well as from Japan and Europe.

"This will finance the mini-Marshall plan that I proposed five years ago (and would have been implemented) had I won the presidency," De Venecia said.

The Speaker said President Macapagal-Arroyo would sign the 2002 national budget before the year is over.

She would do so, he said, without a public ceremony.

"She's quietly signing the budget," said the Speaker, who had the President as guest in his 65th birthday celebration the other day.

Public comeback eyed for Mike A

By Carlito Pablo

AFTER staying out of the public eye for the last quarter of this year, is controversial First Gentleman Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo making a comeback in 2002?

Malacañang yesterday said there are numerous requests from the poor for President Macapagal-Arroyo's spouse to reopen at least his radio program so that they'll have somebody to run to for help.

"Some of these poor people are actually angry that they no longer have a venue to air their needs," presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao said in a briefing.

"We hope the public slowly realizes that the First Gentleman has been actually helpful in charity work and they will appreciate him for that," Tiglao also said.

Arroyo stopped hosting his weekly television programs over the government-owned National Broadcasting Network 4 and the sequestered RPN-9 and his radio program "Kaibigan" over dzRH sometime last October.

It was during this period that two major controversies were hounding him: the alleged financial scam at the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office and the supposed P40 million bribery for the recall of his wife's veto over two telecommunication franchises.

"Since he stopped his radio program, there had been a lot of requests for it to be reopened," Tiglao said. "A lot of calls."

Farmers press Danding ouster from SMC helm

By Gerald G. Lacuarta

MILITANT farmers pushing for the full recovery of the coconut levy funds now estimated to be worth P130 billion will launch protest actions at the start of year 2002 to press for the ouster of Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. as chair of the San Miguel Corp.

Rafael Mariano, chair of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, said the storm of protests codenamed "Alis Danding," was aimed at convincing President Macapagal-Arroyo to move for Cojuangco's ouster from the SMC chairmanship.

The President had said she has no plans to remove Cojuangco from the helm of the SMC and instead ordered a "hunt" for the a P700-million coco levy shares' dividends from the SMC which were found to be "missing."

"We demand the President to end her 'political concubinage' with Danding. Cronyism has a price to pay. Two anti-peasant and anti-people presidents have been ousted due to cronyism," Mariano warned.

Mariano said the government must move for withdrawal of coco levy funds held in stocks at the United Coconut Planters Bank and SMC and return the funds to small coconut farmers who paid the levy from 1974 to 1982.

"This storm of protest actions aimed at recovering the P130-billion coconut levy funds will be the peasantry's New Year's greeting to the Macapagal-Arroyo administration. The Macapagal government must work for the immediate pull-out of the small coconut farmers' money from the UCPB, SMC, and return the funds directly to its real owners," Mariano said.

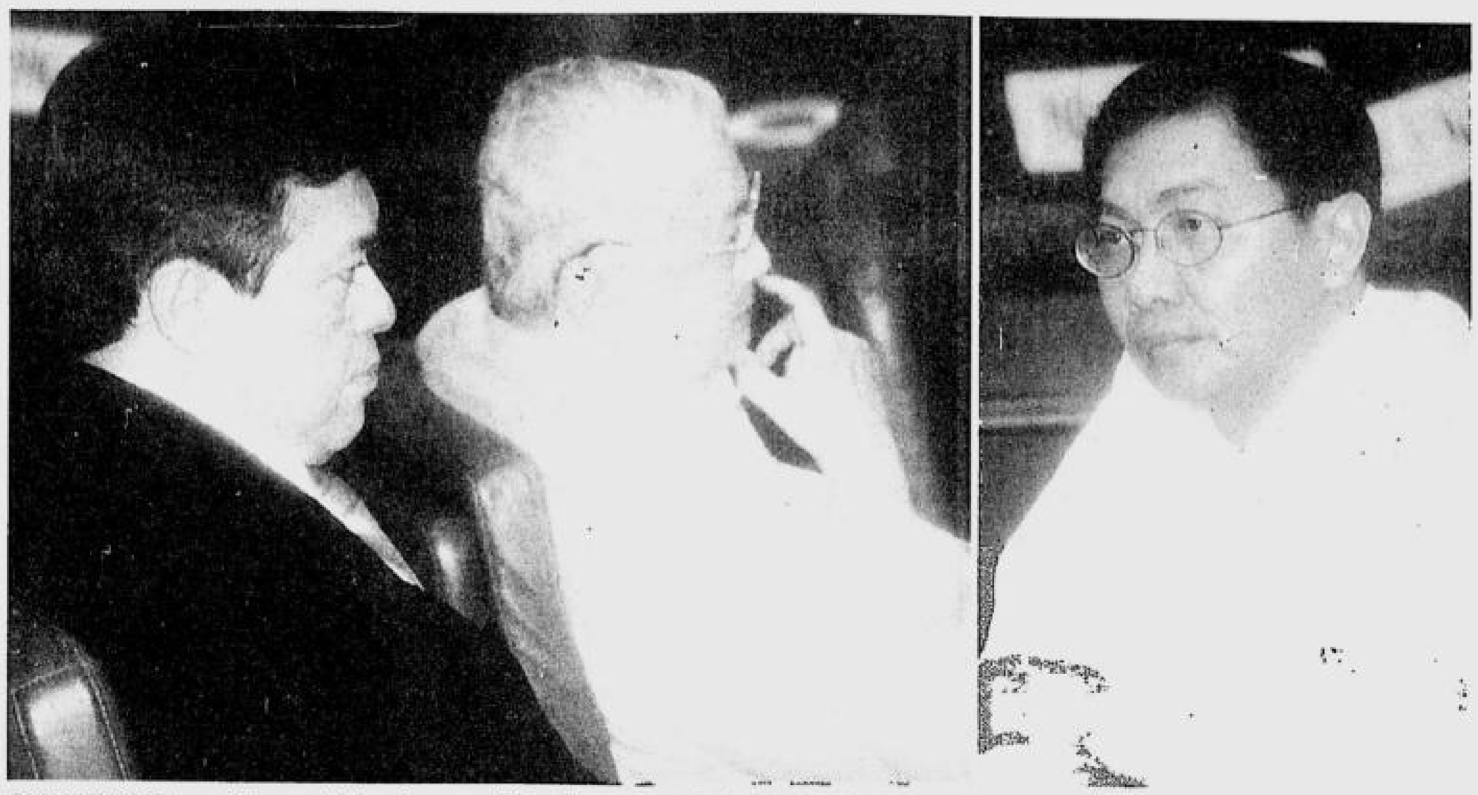
Early this month, the Supreme Court ruled that the coconut levy funds are "prima facie" public funds.

The KMP yesterday announced that together with SMC workers, it was planning to file criminal and civil suits against Cojuangco next year.

"Cojuangco have long been exploiting SMC workers, and this exploitation has been aggravated by Cojuangco by using small coconut farmers' money against them (SMC workers)," Mariano said.

Jan. 2 is new deadline for Marcelo

By Norman Bordadora



SENATORS Manny Villar and Joker Arroyo grill Pacifico Marcelo (right) during the Senate blue ribbon committee hearing.

THE END of the Christmas holidays could likewise spell the end of the line for Pacifico Marcelo, the businessman who accused President Macapagal-Arroyo of demanding a controlling stake in his telecommunications firm.

Immigration Commissioner Andrea Domingo is looking at the first working day of the New Year, Jan. 2, as the new deadline for Marcelo to submit himself and the necessary documents to the Bureau of Immigration to prove his Filipino citizenship.

Domingo has given Marcelo until Jan. 2 to appear before the bureau and to submit documents that would prove his Filipino citizenship. Domingo made the announcement on nationwide radio over the holidays and was likewise quoted on the Internet by the news web site Inq7.net.

Associate Commissioner Orlando Dizon told the INQUIRER that Marcelo could either be arrested on that date or have a case of deportation filed against him for failing to comply with the bureau's requirement of proof of citizenship.

"There is no rule of thumb with regard to these matters. It all depends on the discretion of Commissioner Domingo on whether she would order Marcelo's arrest or initiate a deportation case," Dizon said in a telephone interview.

Marcelo's previous deadline to produce proof, said Dizon, was on Dec. 17. The date, however, was declared a non-working holiday by Ms Macapagal in deference to the observance of the end of Ramadan by the Muslims in the country.

"It was declared a holiday but I went to the office on that day. He might say that he went to the bureau to submit his documents but nobody was there to receive them. So I went to work even if it was a holiday," Dizon said.

"Personally, I think he should be arrested," the associate commissioner said.

In his affidavit submitted to the Senate, Marcelo said Ms Macapagal had allegedly demanded 51 percent ownership of his Philippine Communications Clearinghouse Inc. in exchange for recalling the veto she issued against the PCCI franchise. This was after he cleared her husband, First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, of accepting a bribe in exchange for the recall of the veto.

Senate blue ribbon committee chair Sen. Joker Arroyo said he was inclined to end the investigation since he had cleared the First Gentleman and had offered no evidence to back up his allegation against the President.

No greetings for Erap

SORRY is all that President Macapagal-Arroyo has to offer to her predecessor, ousted President Joseph Estrada, who spent Christmas in jail for the first time.

Her spokesperson said Ms Macapagal will not make any special excuse for Estrada to let him go home for the holidays.

The Sandiganbayan denied the request for a Christmas furlough of the former President and his son, former San Juan Mayor Jinggoy Estrada.

The two are detained while undergoing trial for plunder.

"We are sorry about that (Sandiganbayan decision) but we have to uphold the rule of law... We can not override the law," Rigoberto Tiglao said.

He said Ms Macapagal has no plans to visit Estrada during the holidays.

Asked if the President called up Estrada to greet him a "Merry Christmas," Tiglao readily replied, "No."

After the Estradas' supporters laid siege to Malacañang May 1, Ms Macapagal visited Estrada and his son in his special detention facility in Sta. Rosa, Laguna.

She said she personally agrees with their request to be detained at the Veterans Memorial Medical Center in Quezon City.

The Sandiganbayan afterwards granted the Estradas' request.

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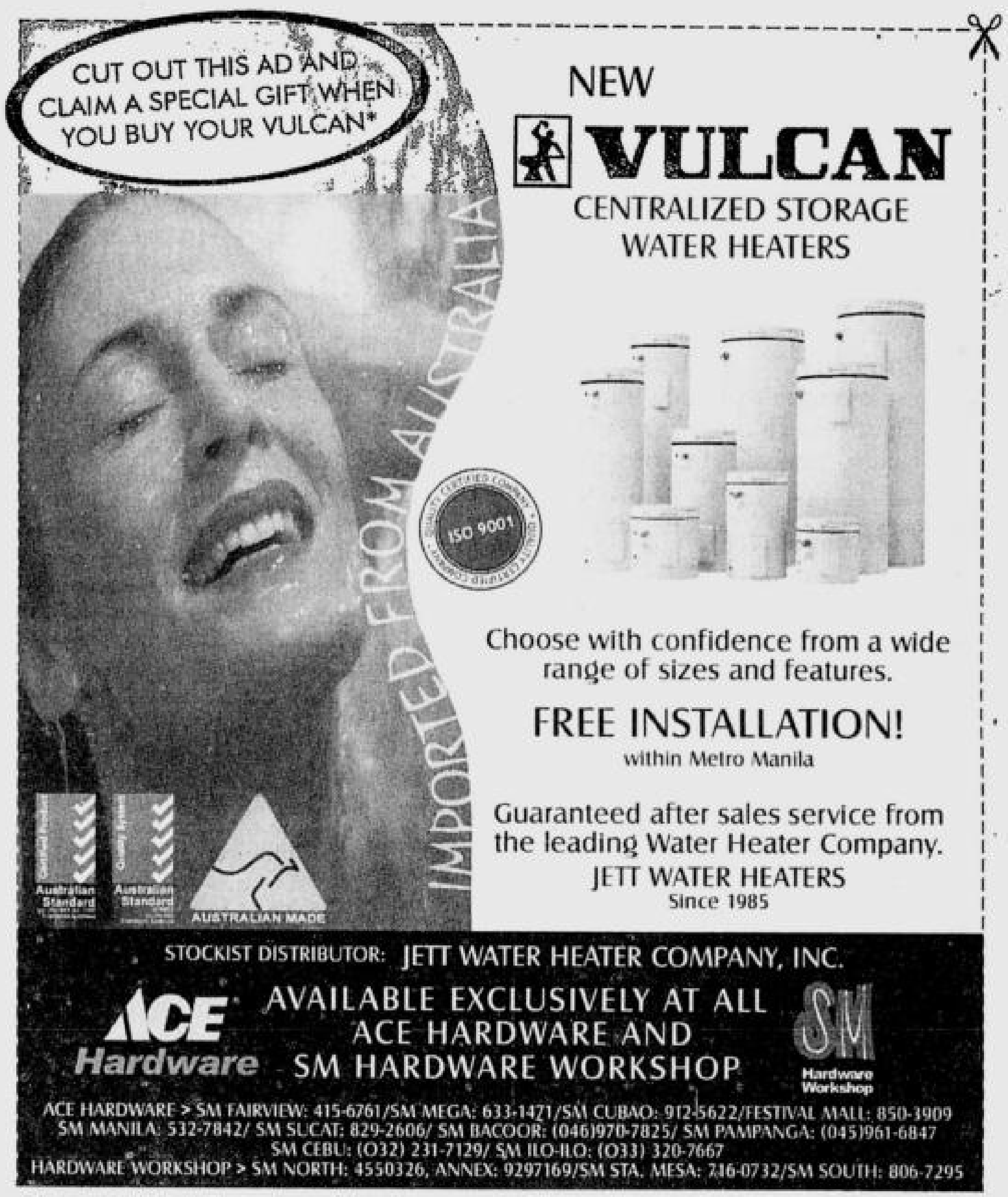

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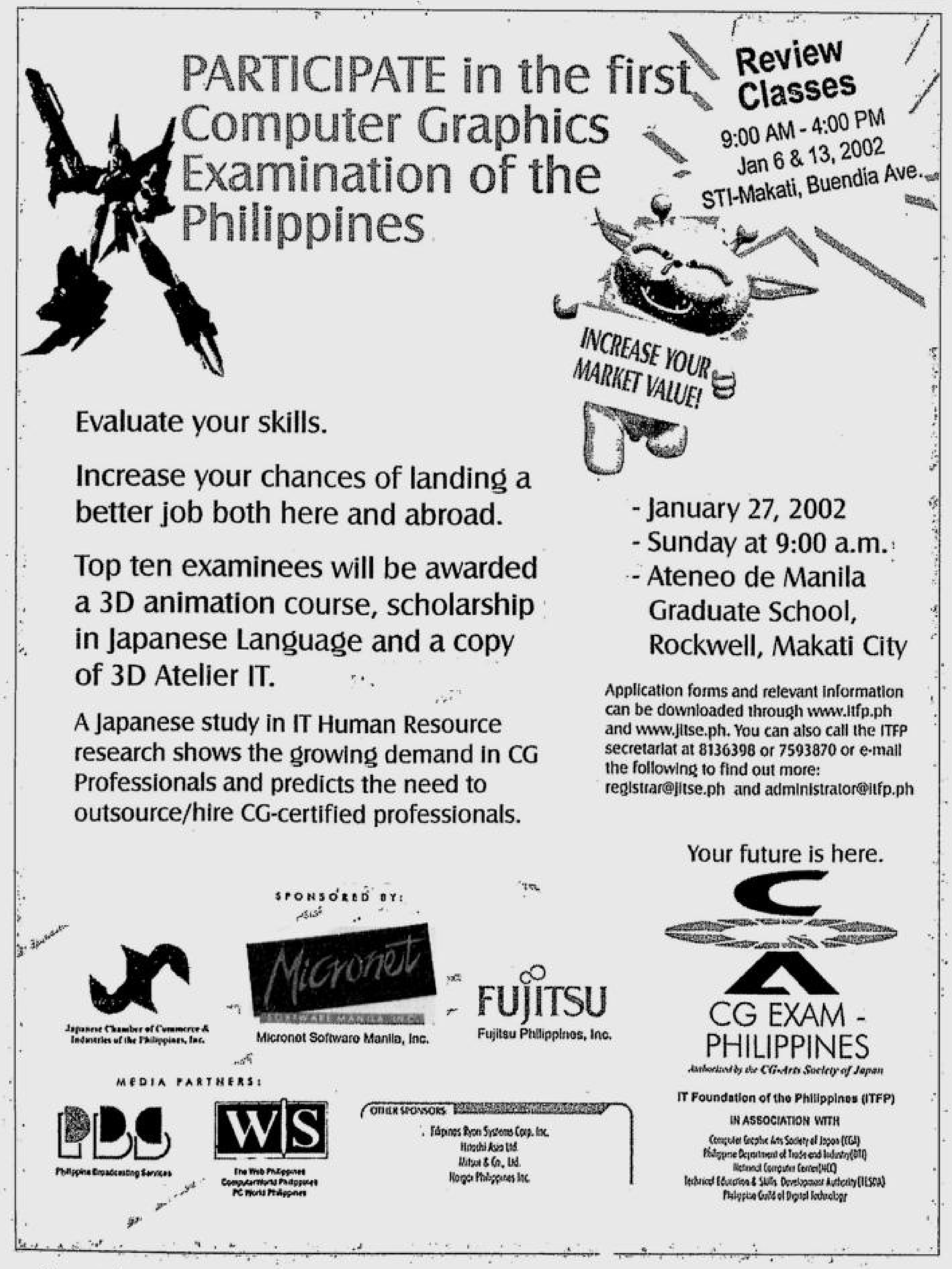

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EDITORIALS

Peace

IT seems propitious that the government and the communist New People's Army only get around to talking about peace in concrete terms—and with less of the triteness that usually characterizes the word peace—during Christmas. This is not surprising since not only is Christmas a good time to talk about peace, it is also the season in which the Communist Party of the Philippines commemorates its foundation.

To the Christian purists, of course, the decision of the CPP leadership to establish their movement on Dec. 26 smacks of poor timing. To the suspicious, it smacks of propaganda; after all, what better way to mark one's birth than to set it on the day after Christ was born? Messianism is alive and well even among groups that purport to be scientific.

The people, of course, hope that messianism will bring with it a measure of peace. A generation has been practically born and raised not knowing anything but the communist conflict. It will be interesting to find out if that generation will come up with better solutions to end the conflict. Or having lived with the sight and sound of violence, it will further stoke the fires of violence, its nostrils flaring for the smell of gunfire and smoke.

To be sure, the need of the times is that this generation pave the way for the resolution of the conflict. It will be a judgment on the quality of this generation that holds the reins of leadership if the conflict is allowed to rage on with the fire of its initial excitement.

The first step as always is to come up with measures to boost each other's confidence. In this, the government has a lot to do. By providing for a modicum of rapprochement it can impress upon the other side its serious longing for peace. The communists can do likewise. The important thing to do is to lay the groundwork of effective dialogue.

Civilians can complement and reinforce the initiatives for peace not only by encouragement and support, but by setting up peace zones particularly in battle zones. Such areas may have been suspect to either side, but it is up to non-combatant civilians to insist that they be put up. The zones will at least symbolize the hope of everyone that peace is possible amid the hatred and exchange of gunfire.

Justice

THE CONSENSUS in government is that the communist insurgency thrives on an environment of economic want and deprivation. That is partly true. But to come up with a policy that is chiefly economic to deal with the rebels will be to mimic the economic determinism that animates the materialistic worldview of the communists.

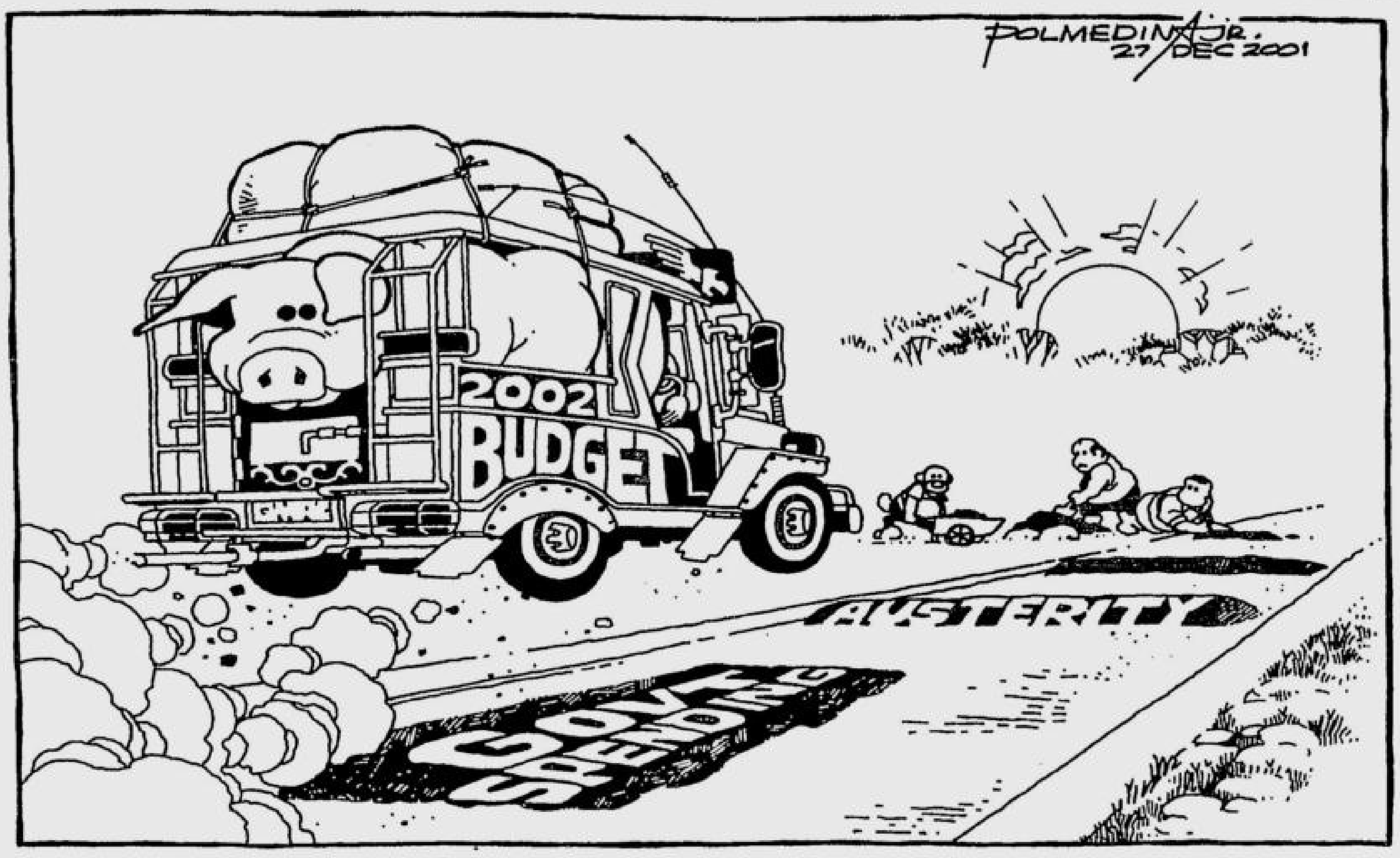
After all, the ills of Philippine society are various but connected: corruption, mismanagement, elitism and entitlement, exploitation, bureaucratic incompetence, poor public policy, violence, social inequity, weak state, and lately, it appears, narcotics. All these have fostered a culture of poverty that has made mutants out of the poor and the rich alike.

With its economic and managerial savvy, the Macapagal administration is perhaps in the best position to come up with policies and carry out programs that will make a dent on the culture of poverty. But it may be hobbled by its economic bias that looks at problems through the confining prism of economics without even a token look at the other variables like politics, history, culture and crime.

It may also be hobbled by its politics, yes, which no administration is inured to. But again, it should be reminded to look at the broader picture.

Perhaps the government would be well advised to deal with the problem of want and violence in the context of the Filipinos' historic disenfranchisement. Economic policies and programs should dovetail with an all-encompassing social vision, which the government, going into its second year, has yet to formulate and articulate.

President Macapagal need not look far to craft such a social vision. By birth and by training, she is in an unenviable position to conceive and expound it. She should turn to the direction of her late father, Diosdado Macapagal, who as president signed the first land reform law and exerted every effort to achieve his vision of "bread and freedom" for all.



Macapagal's biggest mistake

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

WHY would anyone in his right mind want former President Fidel V. Ramos to become president again? Haven't we had enough of him? Sure, the two presidents who succeeded him were worse, but that does not make Ramos a shining hero.

Ramos made many wrong decisions besides the Centennial Expo and the PEA-Amari deal during his term. We are still suffering and paying for one of them. That is the contracts he signed with the independent power producers (IPPs) to generate electricity for the National Power Corp., contracts that led to the bankruptcy of the state power firm and the enactment of the Power Reform Act. That law authorizes the sale of Napocor assets at bargain prices to private interests, some of whom are the IPPs, while the taxpayers are made to pay for the debts incurred by the Napocor to set up and operate the power plants to be sold, debt-free, to private parties.

The seeds of that debacle were planted by Ramos when he signed those contracts that are grossly disadvantageous to the government. The contracts guaranteed payment—at high rates—by the Napocor to the IPPs even if they don't generate electricity because of a power glut (Ramos signed too many contracts). This made the Napocor lose money in spite of charging the second-highest rates in Asia. From a profitable corporation, it became a losing one after Ramos' term. Do we want more of this?

The people who have been urging him to run again in 2004 and spreading the rumors that he will, must have selfish motives. They want to be appointed to juicy government positions when Ramos becomes president again. Ramos said it himself:

"These Lakas people who are putting out this message (that he might run for president in 2004) are probably doing it on their own, for their own benefit. If they are not yet in positions of responsibility in the government now, they want to be placed in high positions later on and they think that my being there (in Malacañang) will be one way to help guarantee a better future for them.

"If these people were already occupying powerful positions in the government, it is possible they want a further strengthening of their own personal positions by having me run."

Thus, it can be considered as Ramos' gift to the Filipino people when he agreed to be interviewed by the INQUIRER on Christmas Day and denied having any intention of running for president again. Sure, *nagkakakalat si* President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo now, but have we run out of presidential material from among the present leaders? They're all birds of the same feather, yes, you can say that. But has the situation become so desperate that we have to turn for help to a man who has sinned against the people?

* * *

I think then Vice President Macapagal's worst career mistake was in wanting to succeed to the presidency before she was elected to the position. No president of the Philippines has ever been reelected except Marcos (and only because he abused his power), and although President Macapagal will be running for president for the first time in 2004, not for reelection, it will in effect be a reelection because she has already served a first term even if it is only a continuation of Erap's.

But Filipinos are easily disappointed by presidents, perhaps because a succession of presidents have consistently failed them. After a president's first term, no matter who he is, the people are already disappointed with him. No matter how big his margin of votes when elected, his popularity is at its lowest ebb by the end of the first term, largely because the people's high expectations are not fulfilled.

President Macapagal is no exception. She has not yet been in office for a year and already she is very unpopular. And yet she was elevated to Malacañang by a popular uprising.

Thus, Ms Macapagal will run for president in 2004 with a handicap (does anyone still doubt that she will?). Unless things change dramatically between now and the elections or she changes her style of governing, or she changes some of her Cabinet members and close political and economic advisers, she would be very unpopular by poll time and would be an easy victim for the next person perceived by the people as the knight in shining armor who would rescue them.

Had Ms Macapagal waited for her turn and allowed Erap to continue making an ass of himself, her popularity as vice president would have been at its highest in 2004. The voters would be dying to boot Erap out and put her in Malacañang.

But that isn't going to happen anymore. She is already in Malacañang and people would be hankering to kick her out next. All because she couldn't wait.

But all is not lost yet. Ms Macapagal can win again if she just fulfills her promise: to propagate "a new politics," to respect the civil service, to curb graft and corruption, to restore peace and order, to create more jobs, to improve the living conditions of the poor and to hasten the administration of justice.

A tough job, yes, but Ms Macapagal makes it tougher by giving all her attention and resources to her election in 2004. Everything she does is calculated to fulfill that goal, from raising campaign funds, to distributing patronage to political leaders and followers, to turning a blind eye to injustices committed on the helpless by her own people. In short, she has gone back to the big bad ways of the "old politics."

And if she doesn't change, she will go the way of all the old politicians before her: to the *kangkungan*.

A 'found generation'

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

WHILE out of town over the past several weeks, I've been asked by people if I thought there was hope for this country yet. Much of it was just letting off steam, but I thought it spoke a great deal of the national mood. We don't seem to be moving forward, they said, we seem to be moving backward. Each new source of hope swiftly turns into a source of cynicism, if not despair. "I actually thought," said a man who was jailed and tortured during the Marcos regime, "we had finally gotten over the hump when we overthrew Marcos." But that isn't so at all. Things do not look any better now. A year after Edsa II, we look worse off than we were before.

I said that each time I left the country, I myself felt an overwhelming sense of depression when I came back. That used to be so only when I went to the Western countries. But over the past 10 years, that became so just going to the Asean countries. I couldn't come back from Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur without wondering what in God's name happened to us. Many of those Thais and Malaysians were just studying in UP Diliman and UP Los Baños 25 years ago, and now they're running the show in their countries, and more importantly showing us how to do it. Can anything be more ironic than we, the home of Irri, importing rice from Thailand?

Indonesia, the country we used to make fun of, has surged ahead. At least their roads do not show gaping holes, and their streets are not home to ragged children. Even the countries of Indo-China are passing us by. Vietnam certainly already has, and we might be soon looking at the backs even of Laos and Cambodia.

Writing columns for close to a decade and a half, I've been prey to upheavals of hope and free falls into frustration, this country having gone through a roller-coaster ride over that time. I've always said that if I thought there was no hope left for this country, I'd have stopped writing long ago. But that is not always a consolation. This country keeps offering new meanings for the myth of Sisyphus. For those who have not heard of it (and that is another cause for pessimism), that myth tells of Sisyphus' lot in life, which was to push a rock up a mountain, only to see it fall again and again.

Over the years, I've become more and more convinced that our only hope is to forget about this generation and just think about the next. I once wrote, many years ago, that if I had my way I'd put all my marbles on education. One commentator took that completely literally and said that was all very fine, but how do we eat today? Well, we're not eating today anyway—I hope he does not take that completely literally again—or at least the poor are not. My point was simply to sacrifice our needs today to make sure the next generation has a better crack at life.

The past years have not disabused me of that thought; they have only driven home its urgency. If I have not entirely given up on the present generation, I am at least no longer optimistic about its capacity to reverse the slide. The depth of ignorance and deprivation in this country today is staggering, and I have always thought that if there is a critical mass to growth, there must also be a critical mass to stagnation. A point at which stagnation becomes self-propelling or self-perpetuating. If we have not reached that point, we are at least hovering close to it: The deadening powerlessness below and unbridled corruption above are clear signs of it. I can only look to the next generation to break that cycle.

By education, I do not mean merely emphasizing it, which the Constitution already mandates, even if government prefers to make debt payments rather than education the country's No. 1 priority. I mean launching into it in an epic way. I mean using all possible resources—taxes, foreign aid, donations, you name it—to make reasonably good education cheap and available to most Filipinos. I do not mind seeing conscription used there, if that is what's needed to ensure that every kid, including the ones who are in the streets, are sent to and kept in school. I most assuredly do not mind seeing the PNP and the AFP abolished, or at least their budget cut to next to nothing to buy more books.

I cannot see that the poor would object violently to forgoing their needs in favor of their children. You go by the way poor parents slave in factories and tighten their belts to send their kids to far-flung public schools, and they would be first to approve of it. Jose Rizal knew whereof he spoke when he spoke of education as the hope of the hope of the fatherland.

We have a thoroughly educated next generation, and we can count on more intelligent voters, voters who will put candidates with good minds rather than good looks in public office. We can count on less crime, people who have gone to school having better things to do—knowledge is power, in ways Francis Bacon may never have conceived—than to kidnap, rob, or massacre their neighbors. We can count on economic prosperity, people who have gone to school thinking not just in terms of being employed but creating their own employment. We can count on better security, people who have a stake in society being more likely to defend flag and country to death than soldiers or mercenaries.

Sociologists talk of a "lost generation," the generation that was deprived of food and knowledge in the Third World in the 1980s because their governments had to pay off billions of dollars in debt to the Western banks. A deprivation that produced irreparable harm, which accounts for the adjective "lost." I do not know why we cannot learn from that experience and think of its opposite. Of producing a generation that has the skills and knowledge to make it in this world 10 or 15 years from now. Education is the key to it, an endowment that can produce an irreversible good.

If there can be a "lost generation," there can always be a "found" one.

* * *

Comments are welcome at dequiros@vasia.com

Pushing the 'weakest links'

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

I BELIEVE former President Ramos when he avers that at this point he is happy to just play the role of elder statesman, or the "*kuya* of the Filipino family," as he vehemently belied recently all talks about harboring ambitions for a return to the presidency in 2004. Apparently the talk is springing from within his Lakas group, which is portraying him as trying to undermine the administration because of this supposed ambition. Such talk is obviously meant to sow intrigue between him and the President, but they are doing FVR a big disservice. He has carved his niche in Philippine history and no one can take away from him his achievements. He continues to play a role in pushing for urgent reforms and programs, as well as his favorite gospel about the need for the country to become competitive in the global age. But to portray FVR as lusting for the presidency again at 72, I think that's a figment of the imagination of his former budget secretary, Salvador Enriquez.

From what I gather, Enriquez has a lot to do with the rumors about FVR's alleged efforts to destabilize the administration. When people ask him whether FVR knows about all his attacks, Enriquez hints broadly that it's FVR who is encouraging it. I think Enriquez is using FVR for his own agenda, and FVR should publicly dissociate himself from him.

* * *

President Macapagal described as the "weakest links" of her administration agrarian reform and the provision of low-cost housing. The targets of 200,000 hectares of land to be distributed and 100,000 new units of housing remain unattained. She was quoted as saying that the two centerpiece projects were not on track even though funds are already available. Agrarian reform and housing were among the 12 major issues tackled by the recent National Socio-Economic Summit of 2001 in separate workshops, which came up with specific targets.

Sen. Blas Ople, who co-chaired the summit with Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo, pointed out in his opening speech that the housing sector is recognized for its "strong multiplier effect" and will be revitalized as "generator of jobs and incomes" to be derived from some 60 industries allied with housing. Ople noted that the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (Ledac) has endorsed the quick passage of a law that will set aside P5 billion from the national government's share of the indexation of "sin taxes" to subsidize a socialized housing program. The summit has set very specific goals to achieve in the housing sector, such as pushing the "rent-to-own" payment schemes and tapping alternative off-budget sources of funds. Many of the summit's goals for this sector are targeted within the first quarter of 2002, at the end of which an accomplishment report has to be submitted to the Ledac. From the looks of it, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is earnest in pushing the various poverty alleviation programs and really moving the economy.

* * *

In a recent column, Ople paid tribute to the efforts of various people this Christmas season to help the less fortunate among us. He cited fashion designer Jeanne Goulbourne who set aside P18,000 to subsidize the education of a young man aspiring to be a priest. Perhaps it's timely here to cite the project of the Philippine National Oil Co. to push as Christmas gifts leather products made by the students of the Erda Technical-Vocational High School who come from the most depressed families in the metropolis. The students, who are all on partial or full scholarships, are apprenticed with various companies in their fifth year to train in various skills which they can use right away, to enable them to earn a living to help their impoverished families.

* * *

The PNOC gifts were made by Erda high school students who trained with Tesda on leather craft-making. What's interesting is that they fashioned the leather products out of the leather leggings (worn over boots) discarded by the Swiss army. The Swiss didn't want to burn them because it would pollute their superclean environment, and someone had the bright idea of donating them to Fr. Pierre Tritz, founder of Erda, who regularly goes to Europe with his begging bowl for his street kids. Father Tritz readily accepted them, knowing what his students could do with them. Among those that the PNOC gifted with a set of leather goods (a wallet, key chain and check holder) was Swiss Ambassador Werner Baumann. In his thank you letter to the PNOC, Baumann said: "I remember very well the time I had those Army boot leggings on" (when he served in the Swiss citizen army many years ago). One might say that those leggings had come full circle in Baumann's case.

* * *

During the budget hearings, the Senate finance committee chair, Sen. John Osmeña, who sponsored the budget, assigned the 12 other majority senators to defend various portions of the budget on the floor. Rep. Joker Arroyo grabbed the portion dealing with the budget of 27 small offices under the Office of the President, involving a total budget of just over P2 billion, or one-third of one percent of the national budget. He thought the budgets of these offices needed less defending than the bigger offices. Normally, other subcommittees handling big offices would get two or three interpellations, but small offices such as those under the OP wouldn't get any attention during the budget hearings. But no sooner did word leak out that Arroyo would handle those 27 small offices than all the 11 minority senators ask to interpellate him. The hearings turned out to be the longest, as Arroyo stood on the floor for over five hours.

* * *

Osmeña stood watching Arroyo being grilled, with that "*nakita-mo-na-ang-nangyari-sa iyo*" look. But the latter chose to turn his predicament around and played to the gallery. When Sen. Loi Ejercito asked scripted questions about the Pasig River rehabilitation project, Arroyo addressed her as "First Lady" instead of "the lady from San Juan," as he recalled the program under her watch. Then Sen. Robert Jaworski stood up to question the budget of the Philippine Sports Commission under Butch Tuason, who's Mike Arroyo's cousin and supposed protégé, asking, "When will we have athletes of caliber again?" Arroyo replied, "There can only be one Jaworski in a lifetime," a remark that made the former basketball star blush. "Perhaps," continued Arroyo, "the athletes will shine again when we have a President Jaworski." Next Sen. Vicente Sotto shot questions on the Videogram Regulatory Board and the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board. Interestingly, it was Bam Aquino, Paul's son, who provided Arroyo with answers to the queries of Sen. Tessie Aquino-Oreta.

Friends and teachers

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

TO MARK the centenary of the arrival of the Thomasites, so-called because the bulk of American schoolteachers who took over the Philippine public school system were aboard the US transport Thomas, Anvil Publishing recently launched the book, "Bearers of Benevolence: The Thomasites and Public Education in the Philippines," edited by Mary Racelis and Judy Celine Ick.

Racelis, a noted sociologist and now director of the Institute of Philippine Culture, and a retired international civil servant, is a living witness to the century-old relationship between the United States and the Philippines. She is the daughter of a *pensionado* Filipino father and a mother who worked as a librarian at the New York City Public Library where she met the young Filipino student at Columbia University, eventually traveling with him back to Manila where she raised her family. Ick is an associate professor of English and Comparative Literature at UP Diliman and was project director of the Thomasites Centennial Project.

"Bearers of Benevolence" is an expansion of an earlier collection, titled "Tales of the American Teachers in the Philippines," which Racelis co-edited in 1959 with the late Sen. Geronima T. Pecson. When this first book was published, writes Racelis, "I did not yet have the advantage of 42 years of hindsight to understand the implicit comparisons...Reading through the many new selections gave me new insights into the role and impact of the Thomasites on Philippine education, society and the Filipino psyche—and my own Filipino-American heritage."

* * *

ICK is right when she writes in the Conclusion that a reading of this collection shows her the need for an "exorcism." She explains: "What needs to be exorcised though is not the devil but colonialism-as-devil...Given the dynamics of cultural creation in the process of colonialism, the demarcations between angels and devils are blurred anyway and we are left with human beings."

Indeed, the personal accounts make the most compelling reading in this compilation of stories, diary entries, reports and official assessments. One of the most touching stories is contained in the account on "The Philippine Experiences of an American Teacher" by William C. Freer, who taught in Bicol, and was effusive in his praise for the Filipino teachers he and his compàtriots encountered in their work.

The story comes to us second-hand, relayed to Freer by a Mrs. Meade, who told it to him while they traveled as fellow-passengers on a boat plying southern Luzon. Because of space constraints, I'm reprinting the story in two parts, to be concluded tomorrow.

* * *

JOSEFA was my assistant at Clarita. She was a charming young woman, slightly larger than the average, with luxuriant black tresses and large, dark eyes, tender and sympathetic. She had married Hilario, a young *almacenero* in charge of the hemp warehouse of an English firm, about two years before, and they had a fine large baby boy more than a year old. She was attentive to her school duties; always punctual and faithful, a plodding student, and good to the children, having an especial care for the little ones; one of the kind, in short, that we describe by the phrase "thoroughly good." She received ten pesos monthly at first, but I helped to secure an increase for her to fifteen.

I enjoyed her very much, both in the schoolwork and when we visited together, for they used to come to our home occasionally on a Sunday evening, and I dropped in at theirs in a neighborly way every week or two. Sometimes when I passed their neat cottage of bamboo and nipa on my way to the government building, she would hold the little Hilario up to the window for me to admire, and say, "Don't you think my baby looks nice this morning?" and the child always did look nice, for he was kept clean and tidy by his mother and the little nurse-girl who cared for him while Josefa was at school. He was a wholesome baby, and well-nourished for the husband earned thirty pesos a month at the *almacen*, and their combined wages were more than enough to enable them to live comfortably; and they took heed that the child had more than usually falls to the lot of Filipino infants.

Chubby Hilario gazed and gooed at me upon these occasions, and stretched out his small fists; he seemed to appreciate the fact that I understood him, baby language being the same everywhere. So I could always truthfully say, "Yes, Josefa, you certainly have a fine baby. And now he has grown since you visited us two weeks ago. And you do take such good care of him." At this Josefa would reply, "Yes, he is a big baby. Why, he will soon be fifteen months old." And thereupon embrace him fondly.

* * *

AS I said, Josefa was a good student and worked diligently at the lessons assigned in the teachers' daily class. She had a good mind; while not very quick, she learned thoroughly and remembered well. I was ambitious for her to take the examination required for appointment to the position of insular teacher, for she would then receive at least forty pesos a month, and she thoroughly deserved it. I urged this upon her for some time before she consented, for Filipinos are chagrined at failure and do not like to compete unless they have a good prospect of success. At length she consented; and from that time applied herself with even greater earnestness than before. Fearing that she might grow weary of difficult study, I encouraged her from time to time, reminding her of the increased pay if successful, and the additional prestige attaching to the position of insular teacher. She remained faithful to the undertaking, and as the time approached I felt that she would be successful. I was ambitious for her to receive good ratings and did not cease to spur her to great effort, and assisted her all that was possible.

Bashed fruitcakes and 'gumamela' juice

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

IN CASE you were so stressed out and almost dropping dead (good for you) last Monday, Christmas Eve, and did not get to read the INQUIRER, this paper had a front-page story with an accompanying cartoon on the survival test on fruitcakes in the US of A. The story was datelined Reno, Nevada and came via Reuters and Associated Press.

That the two international news agencies ran that story for their thousands of media clients was proof that the event was newsworthy indeed. And for a variety of reasons. It depends on how you look at it.

First I laughed. Then I turned livid.

Here's why: "The fruitcake has been a ubiquitous gift during Christmas that it has become the butt of numerous jokes including Johnny Carson's well-known crack that there's only one fruitcake that gets passed around year after year.

"So how does one get rid of this unwanted dense mixture of pound cake, nuts and candied fruit? Drop it from a tall building? It hardly sustains a scratch. Shoot it with a submachine gun? It survives.

"But run it over with a sport utility vehicle (SUV) or kick it like a football and it crumbles, according to a just published investigation by the Reno Gazette-Journal.

"The publication, in an effort to rid its readers' homes of the unloved seasonal treat, mounted a series of experiments to determine the best way to destroy a gift 'nearly everyone receives and few actually want.'"

Gazette-Journal reporter Camille Hayes who organized the fruitcake demolition test said that the SUV was the one that successfully destroyed the resilient fruitcake.

Funny? They even called fruitcake an "edible doorstop."

I miss the scent of fruitcakes this season and this tells me that people have avoided giving them away, knowing that recipients might just rewrap and pass them on.

But these things stop with me. I loved fruitcake even when I was a kid and I love it until now. I know how to make it too. Fruitcake lover Clinton Palanca of the Lifestyle section's "The Mad Hat Party" column surveyed the scene and thinks scented candles have become the new fruitcake.

But seriously now, I was aghast when I learned that a US journalist organized the fruitcake demolition event, with the support, I presume, of her newspaper. Hayes probably received a bonus for landing her effort in the international news. It even got front-page treatment in the INQUIRER. I'm glad it did. For it loudly said something which had nothing to do with fruitcakes.

I am not surprised that something as delicious as a fruitcake would get kicked around in a place like the United States. They bash pumpkins, don't they? They even turn many into jack-o-lanterns instead of pumpkin pie. (Or are they the inedible variety?)

But we've seen lots of American slapstick that feature pie-throwing and comedians being lathered with whipped cream and smothered with syrup and ketchup. Maybe they use faux cream, syrup or ketchup but the message is the same: food can be thrown around, wasted.

If you come from a poverty-stricken part of the world, you'd be disgusted, shocked. I wish they'd show more of this to people with sunken eyes, who hobble around on stiletto legs, who dream of old bread falling from helicopters. Osama bin Laden would feel vindicated.

America, the so-called "land of milk and honey" and "amber waves of grain," is a land of wasted food and food wasters. Open the refrigerator of a middle-class American family and you'd be shocked with what you see.

In one "Oprah Show," Oprah Winfrey got an expert to show Americans why their overloaded refs are breeding grounds for life-threatening flora and fauna. They keep more than what they can eat. They eat more than what their bodies need. They waste, waste, waste. They have problems with obesity. They have no reverence for food. This is the impression I get from the fruitcake-bashing exercise.

Once at a World Bank-sponsored gathering of development agencies where poverty was tackled, a well-meaning non-Filipino said that the poor would have more rice if cheap "inferior rice" would be made available to them. Later, the expat offered profuse apologies.

There is no such thing as "inferior rice," several protested. In Asia, someone emphasized, rice grains are like gems and handled with reverence. I agree. I grew up where rice was plenty but I have developed a reverence for these grains—pearly white or rich reddish brown—that I can't stand seeing them spilled on the ground and swept away.

* * *

For food wasters and bashers, here's a **Recipe**—not for fruitcake—but **For Feeding the World** that hangs in my kitchen:

Ingredients: People's need for good food. Land for people, not profit. Credit for small landholders. Fair commodity prices. Fair wages. Appropriate technology. Care for the environment.

Method: Stir well till all problems are dissolved. Keep ingredients free from war, corruption and greedy agribusiness or the mixture will curdle. Feeds at least 5 to 6 billion.

* * *

Hibiscus nectar. Some of the food gifts that came my way were from the Mangyans of Mindoro whose struggles I have written about several times. Many Mangyans have learned skills like food processing at the Tugdaan Center run by the Holy Spirit nuns. Among the products (for sale) they have concocted are "hibiscus nectar" or *gumamela* extract and *kalamansi* concentrate laced with honey, and jam made from mountain flowers. Thank you, Sisters, for bringing them over. Thanks too for the gigantic cookie jar filled with German cookies and the packs of *saluyot polvoron* in crisp *barquillos* cylinders.

Gumamela and *saluyot* are great for digestion. Great too for those in search of the so-called "alternative cuisine" and the alternative life.

May we learn humility from the Christ Child.
*****A wondrous Christmas and New Year.*****

Great desires

YOUNGBLOOD

Gerome Lorenzo

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

JUST seven months ago, I was walking down the street when I happened to see an announcement saying: "Are you a man of great desires? Join the Jesuit Vocation Seminar."

The question of whether or not I was meant to become a priest had been occupying my mind for months. My soul was in turmoil as I often felt that my life had no meaning and direction unless I knew clearly the kind of life I was meant to live. But I finally opened myself to the possibility of entering the priestly life during the Holy Week retreat-seminar at the Jesuit Novitiate in Novaliches, Quezon City earlier this year.

It was there that I met the novices. Oftentimes I would find myself gazing at them in amazement because of how they seemed to give life so much meaning and embrace it with enthusiasm, joy and passion. They were young men from different family backgrounds and different areas of the country. Some came from rich and prominent families. Most of them studied in the finest schools and some had graduated with distinction and honors.

What fascinated me most was that despite their brilliance and amid all the advances in technology, the pleasures of life and the attraction of material wealth, they chose to live a life of simplicity and celibacy. They chose to dedicate their lives to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ: helping the needy, being with the poor, spending many hours in prayer, and guiding people toward God. They gave themselves to others without any thought of recompense. And from the way they looked, they were very contented and happy.

How I admired the kind of life the Jesuits were living. Simple as they seemed, they were certainly men of great desires. And I wanted that kind of life. I wanted to be a Jesuit.

In my continuous search for meaning and confirmation of my vocation, I went through a simple process of discernment. During our vocation seminar, one of the handouts given to us discussed discernment. It suggested a process of recalling past experiences especially during one's childhood and formative years.

I spent many moments of solitude, asking for the grace of God. I recalled those times when I was growing up: my happiest moments, my likes and dislikes, my frustrations and triumphs, my sorrows and joys. I tried to examine at great length what it was that I really desired most. Did I really want to become a priest? Was God calling me to the religious life? Was I really what that advertisement said, "a man of great desires"?

Back in high school, I was picked by my classmates as the person most likely to become a priest because of my so-called "saintly" ways. I was silent, sensible, calm and had an aura of holiness, they said.

In college I soon became a student leader active in a religious organization on campus. A lot of my extracurricular activities revolved around this religious group of young men and women dedicated to helping with the liturgical services in our university chapel. The chapel became my second home. On important feast days, I often found myself acting as the head server and overall coordinator. Many times I felt I was good at it.

The years passed and I found myself still doing basically the same things. As a professional, I spend more time giving retreats and recollections to students. Occasionally, I write letters of inspiration, facilitate prayer meetings with close friends and organize formation seminars for students.

This pattern of my life made me think that I was meant to become a priest, and that I would make a good priest. But at the time when things seemed so clear to me, I realized God had other plans for me.

Having gone through the whole discernment process, I discovered two wonderful truths:

First, I love serving God as a lay person. Many times I touch someone's life because of the very human and typical lay-life experiences I share and how I find God in those seemingly monotonous events in my life. Surprisingly, they can relate with me well. Many times I meet a lot of interesting persons and my life has grown tremendously because of them. Hearing from people whose lives I touched even just a little has always given me great joy and fulfillment. I have come to realize that I am happy serving God as a lay person, and I could not ask for more.

Second, in the recesses of my heart I still feel the void left after the loss of my father and the warmth only a father could give. As a child I was wounded. My parents separated and I grew up without my father. Since then I have not seen him.

I believe that people's search for meaning is based on the desire to gratify childhood needs. Such needs may include the desire to help others and not letting them experience the bad things that happened to you. This is the reason I want to become a loving and doting father to my children someday. With a heart that longs for a female companion and an intact, happy family, I think that my deepest desire is to be married and to have children.

I feel very much at peace with these two discoveries, these truths in me.

I still see that old recruitment advertisement down the street and around the corner. It still poses the same question. But this time I have a clearer answer. I may have decided not to become a priest, but my life has been based on the continuous desire to serve God and others, to touch people's lives, and hopefully become a good dad.

Am I a man of great desires? Certainly, I still am.

Gerome Lorenzo, 24, serves as a campus minister at the Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan

THEY SAID

Best choice

"I have no problem with your good intentions, Secretary Reyes. I just want you to be careful in signing contracts given your impressive academic credentials. What I'm saying is, you had choices, Mr. Secretary, and we would like to know if your choice was the best."

—Sen. Sergio Osmeña III during deliberations of the Commission on Appointments on Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes

Cuter Santa

"I was cuter than their Santa."

—Six-year-old Joel Demmon who dressed up like Santa Claus and gave away presents inside a mall where he was later asked to leave

Shoot down

"The Supreme Court should shoot down this betrayal of the people's trust and public interest."

—Fisherfolk group Pamalakaya spokesperson Gerry Albert Corpuz on the San Miguel Corp.-Kirin deal

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No peace for evil men

IN THE SPIRIT of the season, we are declaring a moratorium on our usual litany of complaints against erring government officials. They are children of God, too, and they deserve a measure of peace this Christmas. However, they must remember that when Jesus Our Lord was born, the angels announced: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of goodwill."

In other words, for people of ill will, there will be no peace. God does not discriminate against evil people. He loves them just as much as he does good people. (Sometimes we suspect he loves them even more.) The angels were just expressing a truism. If a person's heart is filled with evil intent, it is impossible for him to have peace.

For our part, though sometimes our pen may drip with acid, our intention is always to bring about the greater good for everyone, including the offender whom we chastise by telling them what the Lord said: "Go and sin no more."

Going on to another topic, don't you find it odd that among the many images of the Virgin Mary, especially those that are venerated during the Christmas season, not one shows her as a pregnant woman, except that of Our Lady of Guadalupe? Looking very closely, one can guess by the size of her womb, that in this image, she is about five months pregnant.

Note also that she is wearing a black sash or ribbon on her stomach That is a *cinta*, an accessory worn by an Aztec queen to announce that she was going to give birth to a king. In time, the practice was also adopted by the common people.

Why did she choose to show herself in this manner to the Mexican people? Like many warlike tribes, the Aztecs and the other Indian tribes in Mexico, valued male offspring. So they usually hoped that a pregnancy would result in a son. The birth of a daughter was viewed as a failure and infanticide was not an uncommon practice. So, it seems to us that the Blessed Mother was telling the native Indians to stop killing their babies.

However, why is her *cinta* black? In Anglo-Saxon cultures, black is the color of grief, of death. That color must have had a special significance during pregnancy or to royalty among the aboriginal Mexicans. But today, it gives us another message. Our Lady is wearing a black ribbon on her pregnant womb because she grieves over the many babies killed by direct abortion (by surgical means) and indirect abortion (through drugs and devices, like the IUD). Her message regarding babies is just as valid today as it was 470 years ago.

Another thing: To us Filipinos, the word *cinta* (pronounced sinta) is pregnant with meaning. It means "beloved." Our Holy Mother is probably telling us that we must love our wives and take special care of them, especially when they are pregnant.

This Christmas, let us say a special prayer for all mothers so that they may fulfill their vocation as God's handmaids in life-giving and caring.

Let us also pray for all fathers so that they may keep their vow to love and cherish their wives.—**CRESCENTE B. VILLAHERMOSA, Megasco Compound, Quezon Avenue, San Fernando City, La Union**

Profit-oriented medical institutions

CONTRARY to the purpose of their existence, private hospitals have become a bane to the survival of man. They don't have any nobility of purpose as they make a killing from their service to the sick.

A hospital in Las Piñas is one of these health institutions that seem to exist merely to drain the pockets of their patients without any sign of dedication to duty or commitment to public health. Its phenomenal billings are tantamount to sadism, aggravating the patients' ailment. Upon knowing how much the cost of her confinement at the intensive care unit (ICU) for three days would cost her, Precy Marquez became even more seriously ill. She died the following day, Nov. 30.

In a matter of hours, from the late afternoon of Nov. 29 to her death early the following morning, her hospital bill had jumped from P70,000 to P89,000. The best accountant will surely be puzzled by how the hospital arrived at its computation.

Who is in charge here? Why do they tolerate such abuses? Such profiteers and greedy practitioners ought to be driven away from a very noble profession. Patients should not be left at their mercy.

To save the ailing medical practice, the government has to control the greed of some institutions which refuse to live up to their mission.—**JAIME S. ORTIZ, Ligas, Bacoor, Cavite**

Garbage dumped near Baclaran Church

I WOULD like to call the attention of Parañaque Mayor Joey Marquez to the indiscriminate and unlawful dumping of garbage along Roxas Boulevard near the Redemptorist Church in Baclaran.

Aside from being an eyesore to passersby especially foreign tourists, the garbage heap hardly supports Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon's ardent desire to rid Metro Manila of unsightly trash specifically in the Roxas Boulevard area.

Marquez should order his men to apprehend and penalize these litterbugs in the Baclaran area. He should show his constituents that proper care of the environment is first and foremost in his political and social agenda.—**PEDRO REFUERZO JR., 6737 Taylo St., Makati City**

'Jalan jalan'

JALAN is the Malaysian (and Indonesian) word for "street" so repeating it, as in *jalan jalan*, makes it the plural. But *jalan jalan* can also mean "taking a walk" or, in an extended sense, "to travel."

I've wondered why we Filipinos don't have a similar word. "*Lakad*" is to walk, but we don't have a term that captures the leisurely pace of a stroll, other than saying "*mag*-stroll *tayo*" and that sounds strange. When you invite someone to "*lakad,*" it sounds so arduous, as in those fund-raising walks, Alay Lakad. "*Lakad na*" has a sense of urgency, a signal that it's time to go. And when we say, "*Mag-lakad na lang tayo,*" it means more of having to walk because there aren't jeepney or taxis available.

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

Rural Filipinos walk a lot, often because there's no choice. Urban Filipinos just aren't the *jalan jalan* types, and you can trace that to any number of reasons, from class (it's, well, pedestrian to be a pedestrian) to the unfriendly treeless city environment.

I guess I'm a bit luckier, being in the sandwich generation that did a bit more walking than younger urban Filipinos. Until I was 3, I lived in Oroquieta Street in the heart of Manila. My mother says she, or a *yaya*, would walk me up and down Avenida Rizal, which was still fairly clean and safe then.

Through my childhood, too, my mother would take me with her to the market, which meant a lot of walking through the vegetable stands, through the butchers, through the, oops, my mother would forget to detour around the section where they had ducklings. "*Pato, pato,*" I'd beg, and we'd end up bringing home more ducklings.

I related well to ducklings (I'm actually flat-footed and have a gait that's, well, like a duckling's). "*Hey, pat di kha*" (it's hard to translate, but more or less meaning, walking with your feet out), my uncles would tease as I waddled over to greet them. (I learned, early enough, Asians have strange ways of showing affection.) To this day, when my mother tells me about our long walks, I imagine myself, well, doing the duck walk and quacking with every step.

After I began school, I did much less walking. Although kidnapping hadn't become a major industry yet, my father was quite adamant about not walking home from school. Later, when I was finally allowed to walk home, I began to understand why my father didn't want me walking: I was being taunted by street kids, "*Intsik, Intsik.*" It was my first taste of what it meant to be different, and vulnerable.

I didn't *jalan jalan* again until college, and then I made up for lost time. It was martial law, so we students did a lot of *jalan jalan* in the streets. Well, maybe *jalan jalan* isn't the correct word because quite often, it was "*Takbo! Takbo*!" (Run! Run!) and "*Dapa! Dapa*!"(oh no, more ducks!) as the police took aim and fired. No maximum tolerance then.

In my last two years in college, I discovered rural service. Long before mountaineering became a fad, we were doing our own kind of treks as volunteers, doing medical work, holding literacy classes and teaching agriculture and animal husbandry. No fancy backpacks, water canteens or mineral water—you went as light as you could, and learned not to ask how many kilometers away a place was. Instead I'd ask how long it would take to walk, and if they said an hour, I'd figured I needed two with my flat feet.

They were never boring walks, with so much to see and always with good company. People knew of the volunteers and were always inviting us to stop over and visit. Walking through the villages also made me see how terribly poor people could be. With time, I learned to mentally block out some of the more depressing sights, but then the smells and sounds took over: you could tell, just walking past a house, if it had children suffering from diarrhea, otitis (*luga* or an ear infection), or whooping cough.

After college, my work entailed a lot of travel, locally and overseas. I learned to avoid the grand avenues that attracted droves of tourists, and instead I would dive into small streets and alleys, where a city's soul is to be found. There were the little shops and bazaars, "little eats" (*xiao che*) in China that serve heaping steaming dishes. And the homes with their doors and windows open, almost as if to invite visitors to look in and get a glimpse of local family life.

I'm actually very bad with directions: I get on the escalator in the mall and end up totally disoriented on the next floor. But that bad sense of direction can be useful with walks. One time in a small town in Chiapas, Mexico, I found myself lost but ended up in a street that led up a hill, with a church on top. I ended up attending Mass—my first in years—with a mariachi band for a choir.

Those walks have sharpened my intuition, learning to sense when it isn't safe to go to a side street. But if as a child I learned the vulnerabilities of being different, I have also learned in my other *jalan jalan* how being different opened new horizons: people charmed that an outsider would take time to walk, and to sit and talk.

Biomedical researchers say that whether you jog or you stroll, the activity induces the production of endorphins, which can give you a high. Suddenly, body pains disappear and you generally feel lighter.

But I think there's more to it than endorphins. Leisurely walks give you time for yourself even as it sharpens your sensory links to people and to the world around you. *Jalan jalan* reminds us that the best of life comes only if you're curious enough to take risks. Life, too, is pretty much like *jalan jalan* because you never really begin or end a stroll. We move along, flow along and realize there's no such thing as an old or new year.

* * *

Comments to miguel@pinoykasi.net

An unorthodox solution to economic crisis

I AM amazed at the way our national leaders are treating the explosive issues of widespread poverty and lack of opportunity in our country today. The President down to the newest congressman seem to be engrossed in political bickering, endless investigations and grandstanding, while millions of Filipinos are practically eating grass.

Are we really a hopeless race? Is it possible that the greater majority of us are destined for failure? I dare say a big no to both questions.

The string of failures experienced by the great mass of our people might no longer be bearable. Pretty soon their deep-seated anger and frustrations could explode, unless an immediate solution to these multi-dimensional problems is put in place on time. Therefore, before anything really bad happens, I strongly suggest that for at least one year, the national government stop borrowing from the private sector, particularly from the banking community.

Logic? None perhaps, except that moneyed people and financial institutions will simply be forced to put their money in economic and productive undertakings in the absence of "risk-free" government securities.

How about inflation and the so-called M3, or money in circulation? Although the rich would fear a weakening of the purchasing power of the peso, that is a remote possibility because the answer to inflation is production. The talents of the bright boys of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and other economic agencies can be harnessed to come up with measures that will mitigate the ill effects of "too much money" in circulation.

What is urgent is preventing widespread discontent and injustice and at the same time unleashing billions of money on the domestic economy so that our poor can get decent employment and they will be able to feed their families.

This unorthodox solution to our present economic crisis may not even merit the attention of a janitor in Malacañang, but just the same I thought I would write about it in the hope that someone in a position of leadership will pick up the idea. If it works, this could be the start of a new economics.—**BIENVENIDO R. MERCADO, Unit 1131, City and Land Mega Plaza, ADB Avenue, Pasig City**

Whatever happened to democracy?

WE have been fighting terrorism in Mindanao long before the United States declared its "war on terrorism" in September this year. But even as we support its noble efforts in Afghanistan, we deplore its ignoble bombing of war prisoners, some of whom had their hands tied behind their backs.

Amnesty International (AI) has called for an investigation. Since we are US allies, we should support the call for "an urgent inquiry into the large-scale killing of captured Taliban fighters and others at a fort on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif." AI has also urged the United States and the United Kingdom to consider asking for a preliminary investigation by either the United Nations or the International Fact-Finding Commission. "The events at the Qala-i-Jhanghi fort must not be simply brushed under the carpet, like so many other killings before them," it said.

Mary Robinson of the United Nations Human Rights Commission has also called for a probe for the sake of humanity and democracy. "Serious abuses against law may have been committed," she said.

So, can the executioners be brought before the new secret US military tribunals?

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has ruled out an inquiry. "Frankly it's not on," he said on BBC.

US Attorney General John Ashcroft put human rights in the trash can as he echoed the straw man and said: "Those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty only aid terrorists."

Is calling for a fair trial a phantom? And does that make me a terrorist?

What happened to democracy?—**EMIL SY, Camella Homes, Bacoor, Cavite**

Dusty, bumpy road to Magat Dam

I ADMIRE Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon's enthusiasm in selling the Philippines to local and foreign tourists.

We have one tourist attraction in Isabela: the Magat Dam and hydroelectric plant. A few days ago, four Jesuit priests coming from Germany, Indonesia, India and South Korea came to Isabela upon the invitation of Bishop Sergio Utleg to help in celebrating the Misa de Gallo in Dimapigue, Palanan, Divilican and Maconacom. They were housed at the Clergy Center located in Guibang, Gamu.

When they wanted to see the famous Magat Dam, I requested Fr. Eusebio Ruiz to accompany them. But I was dismayed to see that five kilometers of the road leading to the dam was still not paved and was therefore so bumpy and dusty. I failed to see any eatery or hotel or other facilities found in other tourist spots.

Hundreds of local and foreign tourists visit the dam and the hydroelectric plant every day. I hope that Gordon will find time to visit the place one of these days.—**FR. JOSE G. INGARAN, Clergy Center, Guibang, Gamu, Isabela 3301**

Doctors' protest against kidnapping

THIS is a reaction to the article published in your newspaper last Dec. 6, titled "Gensan dentists, docs fight back."

The closure for three days of the doctors' clinics was initiated by the officers and members of the General Santos City Medical Society as an expression of our outrage against kidnappings in general, the most recent one being that of Dr. Josefina Montecillo, a dentist and wife of our esteemed colleague Dr. Achilles Montecillo. The couple and their family have been known for their simple lifestyle, charity and compassion to the poor and the unfortunate.

In closing our clinics, we did not neglect our sworn duty to our patients because we still took care of patients admitted to the hospitals. We attended to patients who needed medical attention in the emergency rooms of different hospitals. Private and government hospitals and clinics continued to be in full operation. The doctors, all private practitioners, closed their clinics on Dec. 5, 6 and 7, 2001 of their own free will. Some of our colleagues who needed to see their patients in their clinics were free to do so.

By staging this peaceful protest we wanted to make the general public and concerned agencies aware that the problem of kidnapping exists and that we would not just keep silent and wait for the next victim to be abducted, whoever he or she may be. The greatest danger comes when we, as citizens, start to accept that kidnapping and criminality are part of our daily life and that we cannot do anything about it. When that time comes, then hope dies.—**LEOPOLDO DURICO, M.D., president, General Santos City Medical Society, General Santos City**

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Writers of letters to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or pager number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The Inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

Dumb choice for Athlete of the Year

FOR THE LIFE of me, I cannot understand how an American can win the Philippine Sportswriters Association's Female Athlete of the Year award two years in a row. Those 43 "venerable" sportswriters who voted for her must be the most idiotic people in the whole world.

Dorothy Delasin carries the colors of the United States wherever she plays. Nobody in the United States cares whether Dorothy is of Filipino ethnicity. Are we so desperate that we have to recognize as achievers people who do not even possess Philippine citizenship?

Pity poor Liza del Rosario, who, despite having won the gold medal in the Southeast Asian Games and placing second in the bowling World Cup, garnered a measly nine votes in the balloting. Pity too the other Filipino athletes who are unfortunate enough not to have the benefit of foreign citizenship and therefore do not have the opportunity to be recognized as the Filipino Athlete of the Year.

Consider this: The Japanese do not give Kristie Yamaguchi the distinction of being their Athlete of the Year because of her success in Olympic ice skating. Several African countries do not give awards to talented African-American athletes who have won medals for the United States.

The point I'm making is this: The question of citizenship should be foremost in the selection of Athlete of the Year, not ethnicity. To select an American as the Filipino Athlete of the Year is ignorance at best and stupidity at worst. Not only does this frustrate local athletes who continue to give their all for the Philippine flag despite poor training conditions and lack of international exposure, it demoralizes them as well.—**ALLAN G. KATO, 2644 Molave St., United Hills Village, Parañaque City**

Macapagal doing an excellent job

THANK you for publishing the pros and cons about President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

I think the President should continue what she has started. I think she is doing a very, very excellent job.

As for her critics, allow me to quote what the most criticized US President Abraham Lincoln said: "If I were to read, much less to answer all the criticisms hurled against me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I can to the very best I know how and I intend to do so to the end. If the end proves me right, all the things said against me will come to naught. If the end proves me wrong, 10 angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

So, hang in there, Madame President. We are praying for you. Remember that there are still a lot of people in our country who are sober.

As a 72-year-old Filipino, my unsolicited advice to the younger generation, especially the media can be found in our Civil Code, which defines the norm of conduct of a good citizen: "Every person must, in the exercise of his rights and in the performance of his duties, act with justice, give everyone his due and observe honesty and good faith."

Of course this is purely my own observation, but from the way the President has been performing so far, she may yet end up as the greatest President this country has ever produced.—**BEN BARREDO, Barredo & Barredo Law Offices, 3 Rodriguez Ave., Bacolod City**

The WORLD

LUVERNE B. GUECO, EDITOR

India, Pakistan gird for war

AN INDIAN soldier takes cover while on patrol near the border that divides Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.
AFP

NEW DELHI—India said its missiles were "in position," air force jets flew near the Pakistan border every few minutes and frontier forces exchanged gunfire Wednesday as the two nuclear-armed nations prepared for a war both say they don't want.

India's Cabinet Committee on Security was meeting Wednesday evening to discuss further diplomatic pressure on Pakistan, including a possible ban on Pakistan airline flights, abrogation of a water treaty, downgrading of embassies, and cancellation of Pakistan's "most favored nation" trading status.

"Missile systems are in position," Defense Minister George Fernandes told Press Trust of India. India's arsenal includes medium-range Russian missiles and the Indian-made Prithvi I, which can be fired from a mobile launcher and has a range of 150 km.

Pakistan and Indian news media reported that Pakistani missiles—including medium-range Chinese-made weapons—had also been put on alert, while troops on both sides moved toward the border.

Both sides' missile systems can be converted to deliver nuclear warheads, but it is not clear whether such steps have been taken.

The daily exchange of gunfire between the troops was at a much calmer level on Wednesday and the flood of villagers leaving their border homes had slowed down.

The Army on Wednesday canceled its Jan. 15 Army Day celebrations and parades because of the mobilization of troops and weapons along the border.

Tensions have increased since a Dec. 13 suicide attack on Parliament that India blames on Pakistan-based militants. India says Pakistan's spy agency sponsored the attack with the help of two Islamic militant groups—the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammed—which are battling to end Indian rule in Kashmir.

Pakistan has frozen the assets of the two groups and the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed was detained briefly on Tuesday, but New Delhi said this fell far short of its demand that the groups' activities be halted and their leaders arrested and handed over to India.

"We do not want war, but war is being thrust on us and we will have to face it," Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said at a public address at his residence on Tuesday, celebrating his 77th birthday. *AP*

US strives to ease tensions

ISLAMABAD—The United States is striving to ease tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, a senior Pakistani government official said Wednesday.

"There is a flurry of telephone calls daily from across the Atlantic to defuse the tension," the official said.

"We are telling them (Washington) that India which is kicking up the dust is solely responsible for the current escalation. Therefore New Delhi should be asked to cool it off."

Defense analyst Riffat Hussain said India was bent on pushing Pakistan to the wall.

"India is in such a belligerent mood that it has left Pakistan with very little choice to maneuver," said Hussain, who heads the strategic studies department at Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam Univerity.

"Whatever steps Pakistan may take to defuse the situation may not be deemed enough by India as a result of the war psychosis that they have created."

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence in 1947, two of them over the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

But Khalid Mahmood, a political analyst from the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, said there would be no new war.

"The Americans won't let the Indians go to war with Pakistan," he said.

"War between Pakistan and India does not suit the Americans because it would adversely affect their mission in Afghanistan.

"Some of the measures which the Indians have taken so far are acts of hostility but not a prelude to the start of a military conflict," Mahmood added.

He accused India's ruling elite of trying to create a "war hysteria" but said this "is basically for domestic consumption." *AP*

Fire erupts at Tokyo int'l airport

TOKYO—A fire broke out at Tokyo's main international airport on Wednesday, forcing the closure of the departure lobby for two airliners—Northwest Airlines and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

There were no reports of injuries from the fire, which was extinguished at 1:39 p.m., said Masaru Kato, a spokesperson for the Narita Airport Authority.

Kato said there was no effect on flight schedules Wednesday at Narita, which daily handles about 360 takeoffs and landings, mostly international flights.

Narita is 65 km, northeast of Tokyo.

Police were still investigating the cause of the blaze, Kato said.

The fire and smoke started at 12:19 p.m. from under a moving walkway leading to the departure area for Northwest and KLM in the airport's No. 1 terminal, Kato said.

There were no flights scheduled around the time of the blaze, Kato said. The few people who were in the third floor Northwest Airlines lobby and in offices and shops nearby were evacuated, airport officials said.

KLM's only scheduled flight Wednesday had departed before the fire started.

Television news footage showed white smoke filling a narrow hallway at the airport. Some people covered their mouths with handkerchiefs. *AP*

Israeli troops enter Palestine territory to arrest 17 suspects

JERUSALEM—Israeli troops arrested 17 suspected militants in an incursion into Palestinian territory early Wednesday and lifted the blockade of a West Bank town in response to a sharp drop in Palestinian attacks—as another dreary Christmas drew to a close in the Holy Land.

Israel's government continued to absorb criticism from abroad and at home for barring Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem, Jesus' traditional birthplace. Arafat's absence was the center of attention in an otherwise low-key holiday in tourist-starved Bethlehem.

Early Wednesday, Israeli troops entered the Palestinian-controlled village of Azun, west of the town of Qalqiliya, and arrested 17 suspected militants. Five of those arrested were Palestinian policemen, according to the mayor.

Also Wednesday, the Israeli military lifted its blockade of the West Bank town of Jericho, permitting residents to enter and leave freely. Like other Palestinian communities, Jericho had been under closure for most of the 15 months of fighting.

Israel says the restrictions are necessary to prevent attacks by militants on Israelis. The Palestinians say the travel ban is collective punishment.

Jericho, in the southern Jordan River Valley, is isolated from other Palestinian centers and has been generally peaceful.

At the northern end of the Jordan Valley, Israeli forces engaged Tuesday in a rare battle against armed assailants firing from the Jordanian side of the frontier with the West Bank. An Israeli medic was killed and a tracker in the unit was seriously wounded. Two gunmen were also killed in the exchange.

During the clash, Israeli helicopters sprayed the thick underbrush with machinegun fire, the largest military operation on the long frontier in decades. Even before the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, the Jordanian military repelled would-be infiltrators trying to sneak into Israel.

Overall, the level of Israeli-Palestinian violence remained relatively low, and Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said contacts with Israel toward ending the violence were continuing. *AP*

Chechen warlord meted out life

MAKHACHKALA, Russia—Chechen warlord Salman Raduyev was sentenced to life imprisonment Tuesday for a spectacular hostage-taking of several thousand people in 1996 in the Russian republic of Dagestan.

Raduyev, convicted by the Dagestani Supreme Court, rose to prominence with the operation in January 1996, in which 3,000 people were seized in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar and later moved to nearby Pervomayskoye.

The hostage-takers, who broke through to safety in neighboring Chechnya, released the civilians. But 200 people—including 78 Russian soldiers—are estimated to have been killed in the fighting.

According to Raduyev, who was held responsible for the deaths of the Russian servicemen, his aim had been to force Russia to sue for peace in Chechnya.

Despite being encircled by Russian forces, he and his guerrillas fought their way to freedom in an incident which again highlighted the cumbersome impotence of Russian forces in the North Caucasus.

Moscow in August 1996 signed a peace deal with the Chechen separatists, agreeing to a humiliating withdrawal of its forces.

Earlier this month, Raduyev said his conscience was clear. "I do not consider myself a criminal," he said.

His lawyers said they would launch an appeal with the Russian Supreme Court.

Raduyev, 34, had faced a life sentence, the death sentence no longer being applied in Russia following the introduction of a moratorium on executions.

One of his three co-accused, Turpal-Ali Atgireyev, received a 15-year prison sentence, and second, Khusein Gaisumov eight years' jail and the third, Aslanbek Alkhazurov, five years.

Moscow had trumpeted the trial of the most senior Chechen rebel commander to be captured, with Russia's chief prosecutor Vladimir Ustinov leading the federal case against Raduyev.

"This trial showed that Russia can fight against terrorism, not only with force of arms but with the weight of the law," Ustinov said after the verdict.

A top warlord during the 1994-96 Chechen war, Raduyev was arrested in March last year by Russia's FSB intelligence service. *AFP*

A US light armored vehicle from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit returns to Kandahar airport after a patrol outside the city.
AP

Karzai orders defense ministry to set up army

KABUL—Afghanistan's four-day-old government held its second Cabinet meeting Wednesday as new leader Hamid Karzai set about urgently tackling the twin tasks of establishing unity and security in the war-shattered nation.

In the short time since he was sworn in on Saturday, Karzai has ordered his defense ministry to begin establishing an army, a process which will involve integrating tens of thousands of fighters from the ranks of ethnic warlords.

He has also appointed a feared northern commander, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostam, as his deputy defense minister in a move that defuses a potential source of opposition to the six-month interim administration.

Karzai has promised that establishing security will be a priority for the 30-member Cabinet charged with beginning the long and difficult task of rebuilding Afghanistan.

Afghan ministers have been moving into their new offices over the past few days since being sworn in alongside Karzai. *AP*

Dog's hair or sheep's eye: Beating a hangover

SINGAPORE—In Singapore, they say herbal soup laced with ginseng can help cure a hangover. In outer Mongolia, men recovering from a big night are known to drain a glass of tomato juice containing a pickled sheep's eye.

The consequences of too much holiday cheer are universal: killer headaches, churning stomachs, dry throats and furry tongues. The remedies vary widely, however.

Some are purely practical, like drinking lots of water to combat the leading cause of hangovers—dehydration. Others are inexplicably bizarre.

Guy Nicholls, 39, a copywriter from Wiltshire, England, says rubbing half a lemon under each armpit is a surefire antidote. The lemons must be rubbed clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and counterclockwise in the Southern, he says.

According to website www.hungover.net, the lemon cure originated in Puerto Rico, where lemons are rubbed (in any direction) under the "drinking arm."

"I can't explain why that could possibly work," Dr. Fred Freitag, of the Chicago-based Diamond Headache Clinic, said.

In Haiti, some stick 13 black-headed pins in the cork of the bottle that gave them the hangover, the website says.

Does another beer or bloody mary in the morning help a raging hangover? Experts say no, it only prolongs the agony, but the "hair of the dog" theory is as universal as the hangover.

The phrase, incidentally, stems from ancient British folk treatments for dog bites, which held that a hair taken from the offending dog and placed on the wound would help to heal it.

Coffee may wake you up, but it also prolongs the pain. Like alcohol, coffee is a diuretic, which flushes fluids from the body.

Honey on toast is a better idea. Honey is rich in fructose, which hastens the metabolism, Freitag said.

"Going to a sauna and sweating out a hangover definitely works for me," says Michael Welch, a 33-year-old filmmaker living in Los Angeles. "You just have to deal with a lot of really hairy, sweaty guys."

The Finns may have invented the sauna, but many prefer a pickled herring and a cold beer to treat their "krapula," which, like the English word "crapulence," means hangover. *AP*

WORLDBRIEFS

Intercepted message

TOKYO—Japan intercepted radio messages between North Korea and the mystery ship that sank after a fire-fight with the Japan Coast Guard, boosting the probability that the vessel came from the communist country, news reports said Wednesday. Days before the high-seas pursuit of the boat in the East China Sea, Japan's defense agency, acting on a tip from the US military, tapped the radio exchange that was carried on a Pyongyang frequency, the Sankei newspaper and other media reported. The reports said a defense agency patrol plane located the boat on Friday, the day before the skirmish that killed at least two of the suspected spy vessel's crew and left 13 missing. Defense agency official Ichiro Imaizumi said he could not comment on the reports. But he confirmed that Japan has reason to believe that the sunken vessel was from the North as it was almost identical to a North Korean ship that made an incursion in Japanese waters in 1999. *AP*

Tunnel closed

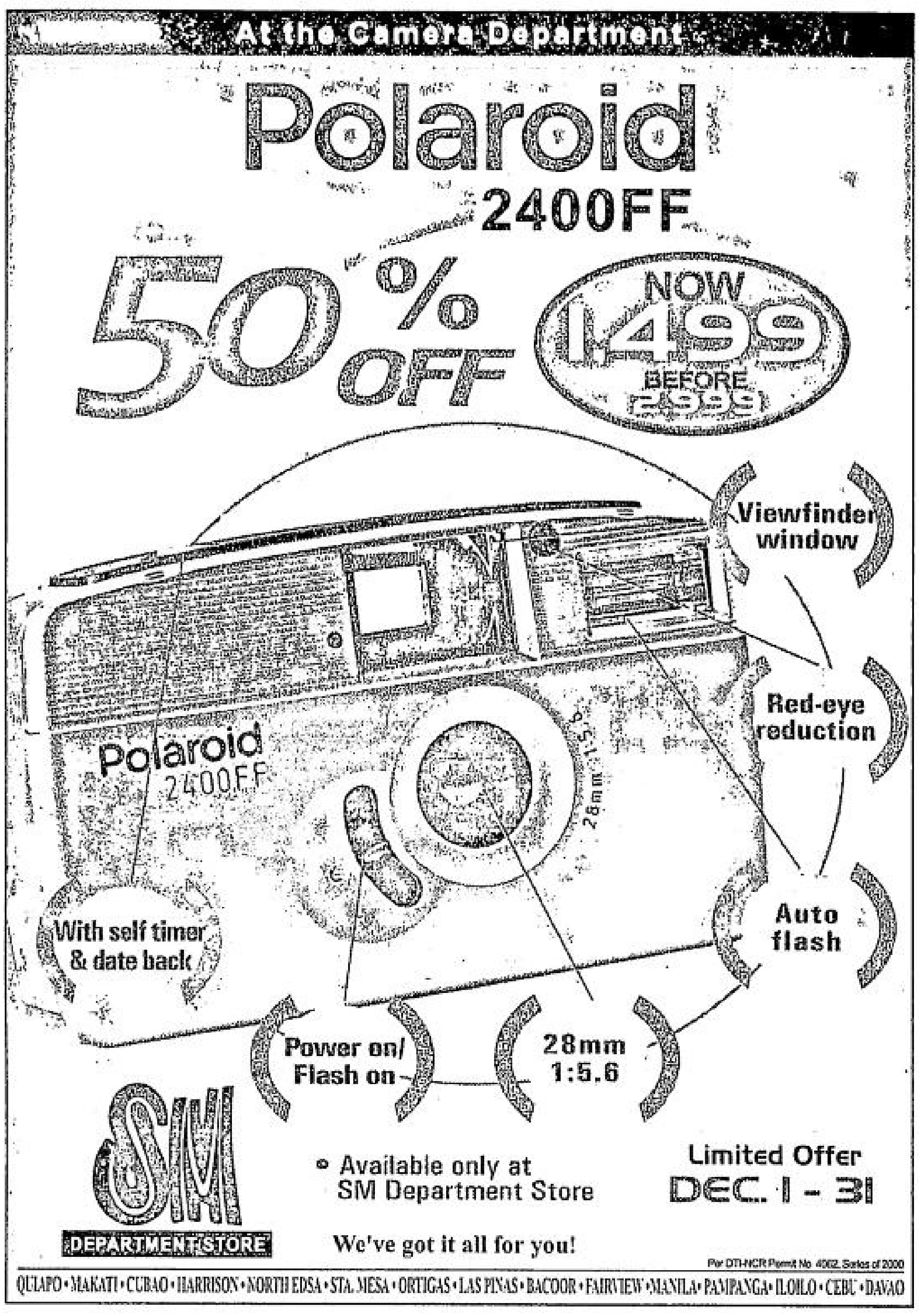
PARIS—Police used tear gas early Wednesday to disperse hundreds of refugees who stormed the Channel Tunnel linking France and Britain, attempting to cross illegally to Britain by foot. In all, about 550 refugees from a nearby Red Cross center attempted the crossing in two waves. Most were arrested, but police were still searching the tunnel, which was closed to traffic. Dozens of refugees try to enter Britain illegally every week through the tunnel, but such a mass attempt is rare. *AP*

Demobilization

KOMPONG THOM, Cambodia—Nearly 400 soldiers, many scarred from wounds and disabled by land mines, peeled off their olive green uniforms to return to civilian life as the first phase of Cambodia's mass demobilization ended Wednesday. The 385 veterans were the last group of 15,000 servicemen and women being slashed from the regular payroll as the government shifts its priorities from war to peace. Cambodia is saddled with a bloated military force of some 135,000 as a result of decades of warfare. Prime Minister Hun Sen hopes to eventually slash that number to between 70,000 and 80,000. "I have no regret giving up this uniform. I have had enough of fighting at the front lines," said Oun Ham, 36, as he took off his uniform to reveal a denim outfit beneath issued to all demobilized soldiers. *AP*

Rains leave 43 dead

RIO DE JANEIRO—Hundreds of poor families in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state are spending a soggy and miserable Christmas after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that killed 43 people, officials said Tuesday. The death toll in the mountainous former imperial capital of Petropolis, the worst struck area, was 26, according to a civil defense official, while the toll of missing went down to 50, after 18 people were accounted for. "In total we counted 43 fatal victims throughout the state, with 26 of them in the city of Petropolis," said Civil Defense operations chief Joao Bosco. *AP*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Bush fires still raging across Australia state

SYDNEY—About 75 bush fires were burning out of control Wednesday around Sydney and across Australia's most populous state. Fire officials believe most were deliberately lit.

Strong winds continued to fan the infernos, which have destroyed homes, isolated towns and cut major highways across the state of New South Wales and around Sydney, the continent's largest city.

Hundreds of extra firefighters from neighboring Victoria state were heading north to join almost 5,000 NSW emergency workers, hundreds of whom have been battling fires for five days.

No fatalities have been reported after five days of increasing numbers of fires, but a fire brigade officer was injured Tuesday when a roof collapsed on him and dozens of others have suffered minor injuries.

Dry conditions and, on Christmas Day, winds gusting up to 90 kph and temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius have left fire crews helpless to contain the flames.

New South Wales fire chief Phil Koperberg said some of the fires had been caused by lightning, but others had been deliberately lit. Officials, however, have no leads on who may have started them and have made no arrests.

Though not as extensive as the devastating blazes of Christmas 1994 when four people were killed as 284 bush fires flared across the state, the winds had propelled the fire fronts at unprecedented speeds.

"We have had what is effectively history-making behavior," he said. "We have never seen anything like that before."

Sydney has been left blanketed by brown haze and ringed by infernos.

"All around the perimeter of the metropolitan area, west and southwest and indeed down the south coast and many other areas, there are fires that have the capacity to flare up again should the wind pick up," Emergency Services Minister Bob Debus told Sydney radio.

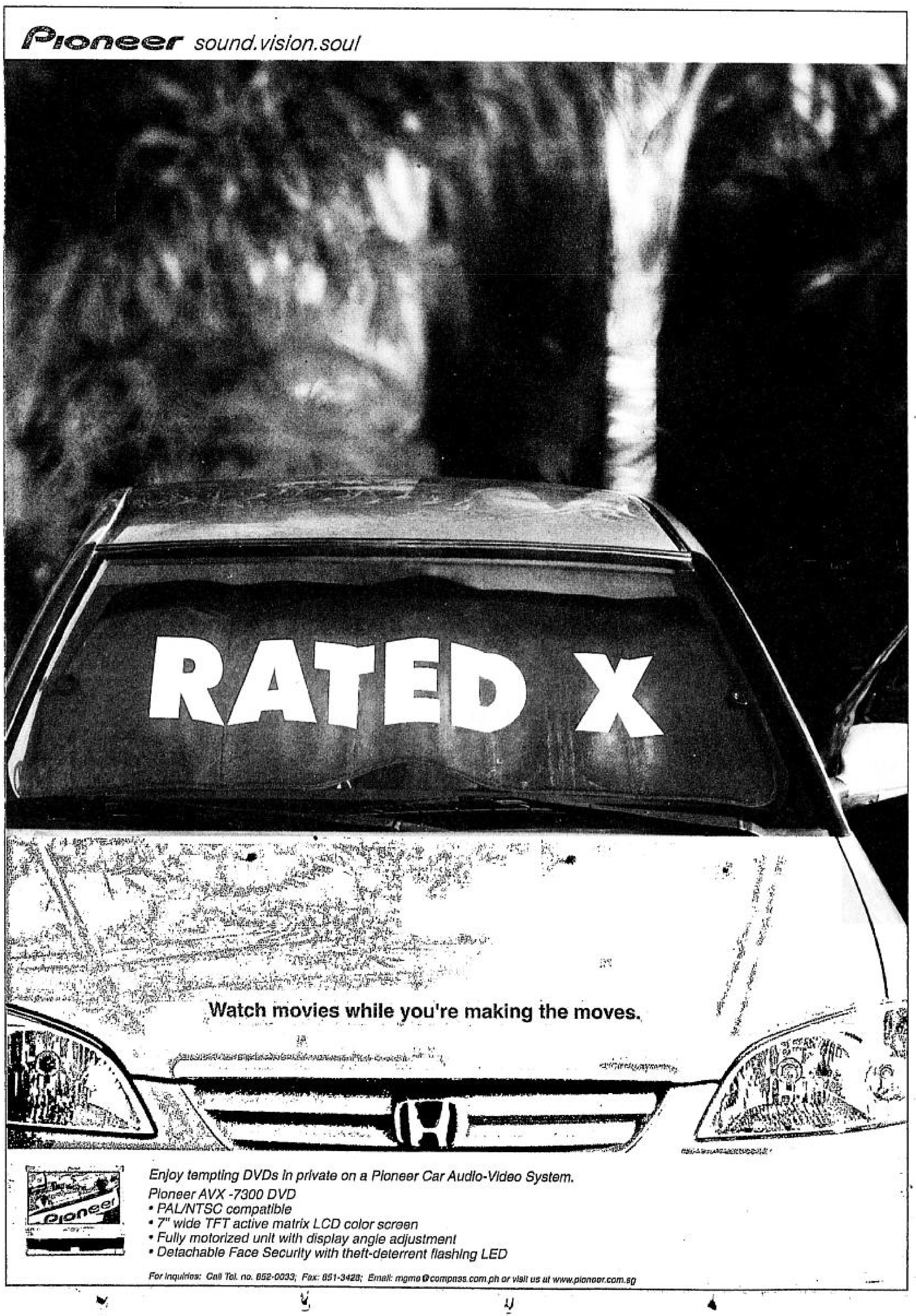
More than 2,000 people have been evacuated from homes.

A FIREFIGHTER puts out a bush fire at a backyard of a house near the township of Waragamba in Sydney's western suburbs. REUTERS

Around Sydney about 80 properties had been destroyed.

Firefighters were no longer attempting to contain the blazes but concentrating on saving lives and property.

With a major blaze now hitting beachside residential areas 50 km south of Sydney around the town of Helensburgh, firefighters faced the prospect of a solid wall of flame more than 60 km wide, Koperberg said. *AP*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Indon train crash death toll hits 54

JAKARTA—The final death toll from a crash between two overcrowded passenger trains in Indonesia was still unknown Wednesday, with some reports saying as many as 54 people died.

Tuesday's accident was the latest in a series on the island nation's underfunded railways. It has led to calls for the minister of transport and senior officials at the state-run railways to step down.

By Wednesday morning, rescue workers had cleared the track of debris and collected 30 corpses from scene, police said. At least 47 people were being treated in local hospitals.

However, The Jakarta Post newspaper and other media put the death toll at 54. Officials have launched an investigation into the crash, one of the worst in several years.

Transport Minister Agum Gumelar was quoted by the daily as saying human error was likely to blame. He said it appeared the driver of one of the trains ran a red light after he fell asleep at the controls.

As many as 1,200 passengers were on each train when the crash occurred just before dawn in Brebes in central Java, about 270 km east of Jakarta.

Two other train accidents also happened Tuesday, killing three and injuring 45 in East Java province.

Indonesia is in the midst of its busiest travel time, with people gathering in their home towns for Christmas and for Islamic holidays in the mostly Muslim country.

At least 170 people have been killed in 13 crashes this year on Indonesia's railways. In September, 40 passengers died not far from the site of Tuesday's collision.

After that accident, Gumelar and other railway officials said they would resign. They later retracted their offer.

Legislator Rosyid Hidayat said the government could no longer avoid blame for the spate of crashes.

"The government is responsible. Someone should step down," said Hidayat, who is a member of the parliament's transport commission.

The country's economic crisis has forced the government to slash the transport budget. Both rolling stock and track are often poorly maintained and there is chronic overcrowding on the main routes. *AP*

Mahathir says news report of plot may hurt economy

KUALA LUMPUR—Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Wednesday that a news report that he was the target of an assassination plot could affect Malaysia's economy.

Mahathir repeated that he had no information of the alleged plot and said that the newspaper which reported it, The Sun, should have informed authorities about it before splashing the news on its front page Tuesday.

"I am sad that there are people sensationalizing news that can have repercussions on the economy," Mahathir was quoted by the national news agency Bernama as saying after taping his New Year's address.

The Sun had cited anonymous police sources as saying unidentified politicians had hired a person nicknamed "Raja Commando" to kill Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi "in a month or two." Police had identified the suspects and would take "pre-emptive action" soon, the newspaper said.

The opposition National Justice Party has said it would seek legal advice over the report, claiming that "Raja Commando" was a reference to member Raja Kamaruddin, an ex-commando and defense witness during jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy trial two years ago.

Mahathir has said that police would have told him of any plot against his life, but had not. The report, he said Wednesday, gave the false impression that Malaysia was rife with terrorists.

Bernama reported that The Sun's executive editor, Robert Ho, had been summoned to the home ministry over the matter.

Mahathir was also quoted as saying that the global economy will not recover quickly from recession, partly due to terrorism fears preventing people from traveling.

"It will recover, but it will recover very slowly," Mahathir was quoted as saying by Bernama.

Mahathir said that the recent attempt by a passenger on an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami to allegedly ignite explosives in his shoes had raised new worries about aviation security.

Mahathir has transformed Malaysia into one of Southeast Asia's wealthiest nations during 20 years in power, but the country is currently suffering a sharp slump in the important electronics sector due to recession in its biggest market, the United States. *AP*

Search for bodies continues as Xmas comes to Ground Zero

NEW YORK—The search for bodies in the World Trade Center wreckage stopped only briefly for Christmas services, then continued, with the crews determined to help console grieving families by bringing home the missing.

"In a weird way, it would be like a gift for somebody," said emergency services police officer Patrick Shea, who spent the holiday sifting through the debris.

Christmas Day marked 15 weeks since Sept. 11, when two hijacked jetliners crashed into the trade center towers and left nearly 3.000 people dead or missing.

The remains of several victims were found Christmas Eve as crews reached what had been the underground levels of the trade center.

The rescue workers at the site Christmas Eve and Christmas Day had volunteered to be there. Many said their families missed them on Christmas, but they noted that it was nothing like what victims' relatives were going through.

"If you have to work on Christmas, as far as a fireman is concerned, this is the place to be," said New York firefighter Tom Sweetman.

Huge crowds of locals and tourists also gathered at the site to pay their respects. Veronique Fellous, who traveled from Paris to celebrate the holiday in New York, said she wanted to be there to feel like part of the community.

Army National Guard Sgt. Enrique Guadalupe spent the day escorting dozens of victims' families to a viewing platform at the site. He said it was an honor to be working at the site on Christmas.

"They go in one way, and when they come out, they have a whole different expression," he said. "I guess they feel some sort of closure."

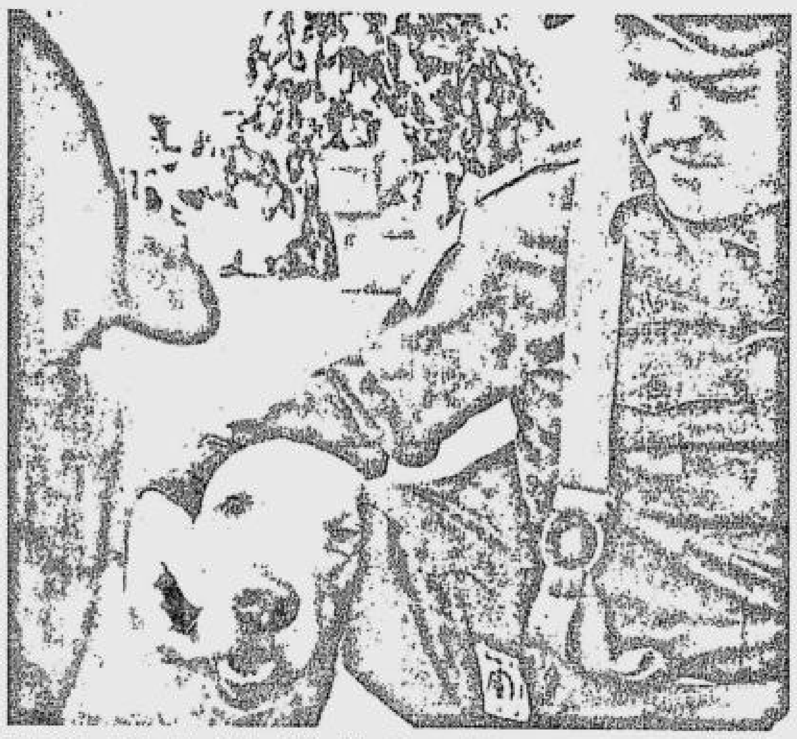
Workers gathered inside a giant tent on the site throughout the day, where Salvation Army volunteers served a Christmas meal of prime rib, turkey and ham.

Christmas was also a working holiday for many National Guardsmen across the country who patrolled airports, bridges and other potential terrorist targets.

"It's been a pretty upbeat day, considering," said Los Angeles firefighter and guardsman Steven Monteilh, who was patrolling the Burbank Airport outside Los Angeles. "People are in a festive mood. They're less stressful, less in a rush, less snappy. I think that's the holiday that brings that out in people."

President George W. Bush said in his Christmas message that Americans across the country were thinking of the families who lost loved ones, both in the Sept. 11 attacks and on the battlefield in Afghanistan.

"This is a day on which we give thanks for the wonder of God's love, for the blessings we have received, and for the families we love," Bush said. "And this year all of these things seem particularly important." *AP*



NEW York City Firefighter Mike Ward pets Nikie, 7, a therapy dog from the K-9 Disaster Relief Unit during a Christmas dinner served by the Salvation Army for workers at Ground Zero in New York.

AP

Widow gets back hubby's wedding ring

PORTOLA VALLEY, California—After her husband died on the last of the doomed Sept. 11 flights, Dorothy Garcia told FBI agents the only thing she wanted was his wedding ring recovered from the wreckage.

They told her they weren't likely to find it at the Pennsylvania crash site of United Airlines Flight 93. But last week, two agents brought her his wallet and the ring, which she knew by its inscription: "All my love, 8-2-69."

"It was a miracle," she said.

Andrew Garcia; 62, was returning from a business trip when the plane was hijacked en route from Newark, New Jersey, to San Francisco. Several passengers said in phone calls before the crash that they planned to fight back against the hijackers.

"We're trying to just remember that my husband as well as every single passenger on that flight was a hero, and thanking them for their patriotism," Dorothy Garcia said.

The couple met in the 1960s when they both worked for United Airlines, and they ran a start-up company at the time of Andrew Garcia's death.

Dorothy Garcia knew the first Christmas without him would be difficult. Little things troubled her, like deciding who would sit at the head of the dinner table where he once sat.

She now wears her husband's wedding ring on her middle finger on her right hand. It seems right, she said.

"Because he was the center of my life." *AP*

Egypt says videotape damns Osama

CAIRO—In the first official Egyptian reaction, the police minister said a videotape in which Osama bin Laden is shown rejoicing over the Sept. 11 attacks amounts to the terror suspect's "complete confession."

"This tape is a clear and complete implication of Osama bin Laden, contrary to what he had said earlier about having nothing to do with the attacks," Interior Minister Habib el-Adly, in charge of Egyptian civilian security forces, was quoted as telling al-Mussawar weekly in an interview published Wednesday.

Many in the Middle East doubted the authenticity of Bin Laden's latest tape, released by the Pentagon on Dec. 13.

But Egyptian security forces "consider it a clear confession of Bin Laden's responsibility in all that happened . . . It is a complete confession that implicates him," el-Adly said.

El-Adly predicted that Bin Laden "would be caught or killed sooner or later," and confirmed the deaths of four Egyptians identified as leaders in Bin Laden's network: Mohammed Atef, who was the network's military chief; Tariq Anwar al-Sayyid Ahmad; Muhammad Salah; and Anwar Moustafa.

El-Adly offered no details on the deaths or on the roles of those killed. US officials had previously confirmed the deaths of Atef, al-Sayyid Ahmad and Salah, all killed by US air strikes on Afghanistan.

El-Adly made no apologies for Egypt's harsh anti-terrorism tactics, saying those who practice terrorism "are not human beings and have nothing to do with humanity. Animals are more kind than them."

International human rights groups have criticized Egypt's indefinite detention of terror suspects and its practice of trying them before military tribunals. *AP*

Charges prepared vs would-be bomber

WASHINGTON—More charges are likely to be brought against a man who allegedly attempted to blow up a trans-Atlantic flight with explosives stashed in his shoes, while investigators seek to discover his true identity and motives.

The man currently identified as Richard Colvin Reid, 28, according to a three-week-old British passport issued in Belgium bearing his picture, remained in US custody Tuesday, a day after he made his first court appearance in front of a federal magistrate, who ordered him held without bail.

Investigators will likely add charges of intimidation and interfering with a flight crew aboard an American Airlines Boeing 767 en route from Paris to Miami.

But determining whether the suspect acted alone or was part of a conspiracy will be a difficult endeavor, as investigators from three countries were still working on establishing who the tall, long-haired man really is.

British authorities said Tuesday that he was, in fact, British. *AP*

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WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: The Eastern sections of Luzon and Visayas and the whole of Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 20°
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Hi 20 Lo 10°
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Hi 24° Lo 15°
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Hi 28° Lo 17°
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Hi 29° Lo 18°
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Hi 28° Lo 17°
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 27° Lo 23°
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Hi 26° Lo 18°
Bacolod	Partly Cloudy	Hi 29° Lo 22°
Roxas	Partly Cloudy	Hi 28° Lo 23°
Cebu	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 24°
Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 30° Lo 23°
Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 32° Lo 24°
Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 31° Lo 24°
Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 30° Lo 22°
Davao	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 29° Lo 24°

Compiled by: Ray Leyesa, PDI Research/12/27/01

Davao firms back 'waste exchange' plan

DAVAO CITY—Big industries, which are considered major pollutants, are turning "environmentalists," as they get involved in preventing pollution in the Davao Gulf through the industrial waste exchange.

Industrial waste exchange is a strategy under the two-year Assistance for Resource Monitoring and Information/Multi-Sectoral Environment Monitoring Project (ARMI/MSEMP) designed to lead to the forming of an environment management system.

The ARMI-MSEMP is a two-year project aimed at creating a community-based multi-sectoral environment management system, pollution prevention tactics and clean production technologies.

The project is the answer to the concern of fisherfolk that resources in the Davao Gulf are being depleted.

Betty Cabasares, executive director of Kinaiyahan Foundation, said the waste exchange project would help industries harness resources together. This means that waste materials of one industry can be used by another.

Cabasares cited the used oil of Ecotrans Car Rental, which can be used by the Davao Union Cement Corp. (DUCC). Or used tires that can be used by another firm.

Under the waste exchange project, 15 industries and their products were surveyed to determine which of these would match the needs of other firms.

Danny Laglagaron, multi-sectoral coordinator of the project, said the waste materials of some industries are bought by some firms.

Alcantara and Sons, for example, buys used paper for plywood. Waste material from plywood production, like wood chips, are used for handicrafts.

"We are hoping that more industries will get involved in the project," Laglagaron said.

Ayan Mellejor, PDI Mindanao Bureau

DA, PNP sign livelihood pact

BY EDWIN O. FERNANDEZ
PDI Mindanao Bureau

COTABATO CITY—Agriculture Secretary Leonardo Montemayor and Police Deputy Director Gen. Reynaldo Velasco on Saturday launched the DA-PNP Income and Livelihood Project in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The project is aimed at providing income-generating projects for low-income police officers and their families.

"This is what President Macapagal-Arroyo is dreaming of for our enlisted police officers," Montemayor told ARMM police officers after signing the memorandum of agreement with Velasco, Police Director Thompson Lantion and ARMM police director Chief Supt. Akmad Omar.

The signing was witnessed by police beneficiaries and their families.

"This project is the common desire of DA and the PNP to transform the PNP-ARMM headquarters into a model farm for other police camps in Mindanao," Montemayor said.

He said the PNP-ARMM headquarters in Camp Salipada K. Pendatun in Parang, Maguindanao will be the pilot area.

Velasco said the PNP is hoping to encourage other police units in Mindanao to use open spaces in their camps for agriculture and fishery projects.

"We will ensure the project will succeed because this is the pilot area and we will make it a model farm. That is my assurance," Omar told reporters.

Gov vows to hunt ransom negotiators

ISABELA CITY—Basilan Gov. Wahab Akbar vowed to go after people who were allegedly trying to negotiate for the release of American hostages Martin Burnham and his wife Gracia Burnham in exchange for P50 million.

Akbar said the paying of ransom, directly or indirectly, has serious effects on the peace and order condition in Basilan as this would only "embolden the bandits."

He said he received reports that a government-tapped negotiator is allegedly working for the release of the Burnhams. He refused to identify the alleged negotiator.

The governor called on the national government to put more trust on military operations.

But Lt. Gen. Roy Cimatu, chief of the Armed Forces' Southern Command, said he was not aware of anybody working for the release of the Burnhams.

"I'm not aware of it (negotiations)," Cimatu told the INQUIRER even as he expressed optimism that the Burnhams would be freed soon.

Julie Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau

20 killed in Christmas gun attacks, road tragedies

BY JHUNNEX NAPALLACAN
AND ROMY AMARADO
PDI Visayas Bureau
AQUILES ZONIO
AND DENNIS JAY SANTOS
PDI Mindanao Bureau

ROAD tragedies in South Cotabato and Cebu that claimed the lives of 17 people and two gun attacks in Negros Oriental that killed three people spoiled Christmas Day celebrations in these areas.

In a village in Polomolok, South Cotabato, 14 people died and five others suffered various injuries after an L-300 van collided with a bus on a national highway on the afternoon of Christmas Day.

The bus, owned by the Yellow Bus Line, was from Koronadal City and was heading to this city when it smashed into the van, which was bound for Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, around 4 p.m.

Eleven passengers of the van died on the spot, while eight others were brought to the General Santos Doctor's Hospital here.

A few hours later, three of the wounded van passengers died while being treated at a hospital.

No one from among the bus passengers was injured.

The bodies of the 11 victims were brought to the Christ the King Funeral Homes in Polomolok for autopsy.

Alfredo Mosquera, driver of the bus and a resident of Sulop, Davao del Sur, and his conductor, Danilo Hilario, were later detained at the Polomolok Police Station pending the filing of charges against them.

The management of the Yellow Bus Line pledged to defray the hospital bills and funeral expenses of all the victims.

On Christmas Day last year, at least 30 people were also killed in a road accident, involving two buses of Weena Bus Inc., in Bansalan, Davao del Sur.

Investigators blamed over speeding for the tragedy.

In Negros Oriental, three persons were killed and two others, including a policeman, were wounded in separate shooting incidents in Sibulan town and Canlaon City on Christmas Day.

In Cebu, an official of the Visayan Electric Co. (Veco) and his wife were killed while their four-year-old son was seriously injured when the vehicle they were riding in rammed into a bus in Bogo town on Christmas Eve.

Insp. Benito Benarao Jr., Sibulan police chief, said Lusibar Roca, 47, of Dumaguete, was killed while his companion, a policeman, was wounded when two unidentified suspects shot them in Barangay Boloc-boloc.

Roca died of a gunshot wound in the stomach. His friend, SPO3 Ruperto Dales, 50, of Bagong police, was confined at the Silliman University Medical Center in Dumaguete for a bullet wound in the left thigh.

Benarao said Dales and Roca were riding on a motorcycle along the national highway in Barangay Boloc-boloc, Sibulan about 10:45 p.m. on Dec. 25 when they were overtaken by another motorcycle with two men on board.

Benarao said one of the suspects then pulled his .38 cal. pistol and fired four times, hitting Dales and Roca.

Maulana Barabadan, 37, of Guihulngan who was waiting for a bus, was hit in the left leg by a stray bullet. He was brought to the Negros Oriental Provincial Hospital.

The Christmas Day celebration was marred by violence during a cockfight derby in Canlaon City, Negros Oriental.

Reports reaching Camp Fernandez in Sibulan town said a man got mad over the decision of a cockfight referee and fired an improvised .357 handgun about 6 p.m. on Dec. 25.

Gonzalo Zalapa, 77 of Barangay Malaiba, Canlaon, died on the spot after he was hit in the forehead by a stray bullet.

Leopoldo Cabrillos, 30, immediately grabbed the gun from the suspect, Billy Ogang, 36. Cabrillos was able to squeeze the trigger, hitting Ogang in the stomach.

Ogang later died. Cabrillos surrendered to authorities.

In Cebu, a Veco spokesperson and his wife were killed on Christmas Eve during a vehicular accident in Barangay Don Pedro Rodriguez, Bogo town.

Jesus Bondal, 35, of Barangay Talamban Cebu City and wife Arlene, 36, were pronounced dead on arrival by doctors at the Severo Verallo Hospital in Bogo. Both suffered severe head injuries.

Their youngest son, Ian, had a fractured bone in the right leg. He was placed under observation at Chong Hua Hospital in Cebu City.

His elder brother, Jaret, 7, who was with them in the vehicle, was not hurt.

The Bondal family was riding in their Izusu Adventure driven by Arlene. They came from Arlene's hometown in Bagay, Daanbantayan.

The family was on their way to Cebu City because Arlene had to report for work on that day. Arlene was personnel manager of Hope Pension House.

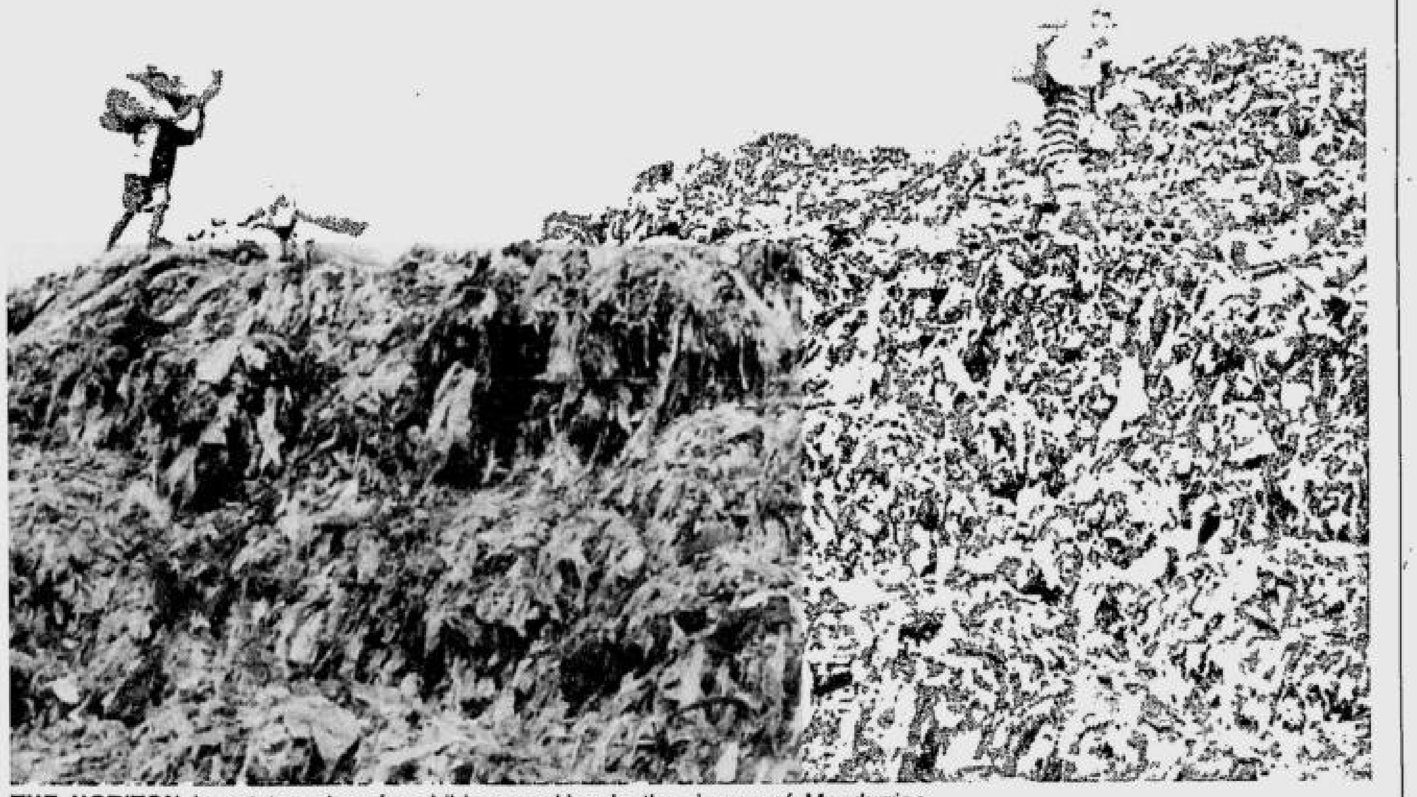
But the vehicle rammed into a bus bound for San Remegio town from Cebu City, at a corner road in Barangay Don Pedro Rodriguez, Bogo.

Bus driver Rene Francisco Pardillo, 32, admitted to the Bogo police that he was picking up speed when the accident happened.

Pardillo surrendered to the Bogo police. He was later released after the police failed to file immediately charges of double homicide through reckless imprudence.

Holiday garbage cheers up kids of the dump

BY MA. DIOSA LABISTE
PDI Visayas Bureau



THE HORIZON is not too clear for children working in the dumps of Mandurriao.

THE HOLIDAYS bring bonanza to Siegfred Rojo, Cristina Paner and scores of children who scour the 23-hectare dump of Calajunan, Mandurriao for scraps.

The smell of garbage brings good cheer to young scavengers who rejoice at the thought that the long holidays would give them enough time to earn enough to buy food for families and few things for themselves.

"During Christmas, the rich are generous that they throw away many things like old clothes, shoes and food. Probably they know that there are many of us waiting for these scraps," said Siegfred, 17, who, together with his parents and five of six brothers and sisters, scavenge for a living at the dump.

Many Christmases ago, and every Saturday, Sunday and during summer breaks, Siegfred sifts through the plastic bags, broken bottles, styrofoam packs, rotten vegetables and all sorts of refuse hoping to find something he could sell like a piece of iron, glass jars, shampoo containers and aluminum cans.

Cristina, 11, is also a child of the dump.

She is often absent from her fifth grade class to help her parents scavenge to support his six brothers and three sisters. Her three older brothers do not attend school anymore, with one becoming a full time scavenger.

Like Siegfred, Cristina welcomes the holidays because she can work uninterruptedly without worrying about books and where to get the next jeepney fare or school allowance. During school days, she hardly has time to scavenge.

Garbage money

Siegfred and Cristina are among the children from 64 families who live off of garbage at the city dump.

They said that the place comes alive late in the afternoon and at night when it is cooler and when trucks come to dump their haul.

Armed with sticks to poke into the thrash, a torch and bamboo baskets, they race to the garbage mounds to hunt for anything valuable to sell to junk shops that dot the entrance of the dump site. If they find food scraps, these are saved for their goats, chicken and pigs.

Scavenging earns children P10 to P100 a day.

When not in the dump, Siegfred, 17, work as a collector of garbage in subdivisions that were not covered by the city's garbage collection system. He was then only 15. The collection trip started around midnight and ends at nine the following morning. If the garbage is just too many for a single trip, his work ends at 11 a.m.

For his backbreaking work, which rendered his arms numb from hoisting bags and boxes of garbage into the trucks, Siegfred earns P1,200 every month. With the money, he sends himself to school and buy things teenagers like him would want to have, like baseball caps and baggy jeans.

"I like to spend the money I earned," he said.

This year, however, Siegfred stopped working with a private garbage collector because he wanted to finish high school. While working, he was often late and consequently got failing grades.

Estela Paredes, a member of a local chapter of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), said that the plight of young scavengers in Calajunan escaped the attention of local and national government agencies here. The PRRM is now conducting a survey of child scavengers in Calajunan after it gave scholarships to Siegfred and Cristina.

No data

Ruth Mallorca, of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) here, said that they have no data on the number of children working in the dumps. DOLE has been active in rescuing minors who were illegally recruited to work and found themselves in Western Visayas. The Department of Social Welfare and Development is concerned more with the plight of street children.

But a study released in May by 10 students enrolled in Island Health course at the University of the Philippines in the Visayas (UPV), said of the many of the night scavengers are 10 to 15-year-old boys. These boys comprised at least half of the 20 scavengers at the dump interviewed by Makram Arboleda, John Paul Bedia, Razel Joy Corio, Desiree Diel, Paul Candice Ellen Eler, Ella Catherine Gazo, Jeneline Hervas, Mary Ellen Marla, Iris Taneza, Chielo Yvonne Yudelmo.

Hazards

The study also documented the health hazards that the scavengers face. They are prone to colds and cough, common ailments in the dump.

They also risk injuries from broken glasses, rusty nails, galvanized iron, frayed aluminum cans and protruding barbecue sticks.

One of the respondents singled out hospital wastes like used intravenous needles and syringes as the likely cause of injuries. Scavengers also were bitten by snakes, rats and insects that abound in the dump.

Since they eat food they can find among the thrash, scavengers also risk being poisoned by spoiled food. When they have an urge to urinate or defecate while scavenging, they often do it in some secluded garbage mounds.

The child scavengers wear no protective clothing, only slippers, shorts and shirts.

Still another risk is being run over by garbage trucks because children rush to be the first to get to the fresh garbage. Siegfred said he knows of several children who hurt themselves when they clambered up moving trucks.

According to the UPV study, it is difficult to eliminate scavenging but authorities should at least improve the conditions at the dump to reduce the health risks on young scavengers.

Paredes said the local PRRM intends to give a Christmas party for the children at Calajunan. "We want to get to know them better because we want to connect them to government agencies that could help them," she said.

The party will feature games and group discussions that would help surface the plight of the young scavengers, who remain invisible in government statistics on child labor.

Cop ordered held for firing during Christmas party

BY JHUNNEX NAPALLACAN
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Supt. Edwin Diocos, Criminal Investigation Detection Group chief for Central Visayas, has ordered the arrest of one of his men for firing his gun during Christmas Eve.

He directed his operatives yesterday to detain SPO1 Jaime Gimena at the CIDG-7 stockade as soon as possible.

Diocos was still in Manila. He relayed his orders verbally through telephone.

Three neighbors of Gimena in Barangay Gun-ob, Lapulapu City, complained that the policeman fired his gun during a Christmas party shortly before midnight of Dec. 24.

At least 20 children, ages 7 to 10 years old, had executed separate affidavits in support of the complaint filed by Santos Geralla, Bernabe Baguio and Marilyn Berame before the Lapulapu City Police Station.

The complainants said they were having a Christmas party with their children when Gimena and his wife arrived.

They said Gimena fired his gun three times for no apparent reason although they suspected that the policeman could have been drunk at that time.

The complainants said Gimena's wife later collected the spent bullets.

This was not the first time that Gimena was accused of indiscriminate firing.

Gimena was also accused of firing his gun in Barangay Basak a few months ago. Other members of the CIDG-7 confirmed that Gimena was facing grave threats and indiscriminate firing charges. The policeman is currently out on bail.

But the CIDG operatives could no longer locate Gimena.

SPO2 Edmund Junco, one of the CIDG operatives, blamed the Lapulapu police for releasing Gimena shortly after the policeman was held for questioning.

He said the Lapulapu policemen should have detained Gimena.

Chief Insp. Jovino Baguio, Lapulapu police chief, said they could not detain Gimena because he was not caught in the act of firing his gun.

By the time his men arrived at the area, Baguio said Gimena had already fired his gun and was already resting in his house.

He said his men invited Gimena to the police station for questioning. The policeman was later allowed to go home after Senior Insp. Nonillo Poliquit, Lapulapu City police chief for operations, was done with his questions.

Baguio said the police would file administrative charges and charges of indiscriminate firing and alarm against Gimena.

Dogs seek 'foster parents'

(From page A1)

pressed that they do not even touch the food served them. They just look away forlornly, as though they were beyond caring.

Feeding

Volunteers of the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) are feeding the dogs until work resumes for the government staff on Jan. 2.

PAWS president Nita Lichauco personally supervises the feeding that started last Dec. 22, and volunteer veterinarian Dr. David Arceo is looking after the dogs' health until the period ends.

Eddie Cañeso, a Marikina resident and dog lover, is helping cook the food bought through cash given by donors, including Christine Ang and PAWS volunteer Tessa Salazar, both of the INQUIRER.

According to dogcatcher Marlon Puro, who assisted the volunteers yesterday, some dogs have been at the pound for weeks, even months, now.

What has caught the volunteers' attention is a big white dog with fluffy fur and a faraway look in his eyes. He neither barks nor responds. His eyes are fixed somewhere outside his cage.

There is a cream-colored puppy with gray spots who spends much of the time sleeping. When he opens his sad eyes he seems very afraid.

At the entrance of the pound is a fluffy, light brown mongrel who at first barked non-stop. A closer look will reveal a friendly creature wagging his tail in happiness.

But the PAWS—or any dog pound, for that matter—cannot feed them forever. The fate of impounded dogs rests solely in the city government's hands.

Unless someone claims or adopts them, these dogs will just have to spend their lives in a cage, some of them waiting for their owners who may never come.

Adoption

Several humans at the INQUIRER have taken notice of the dogs' plight. And they have "reserved" their choices for when the Marikina City Animal Protection and Control Office opens to sign the necessary papers.

INQUIRER chief photographer Ernie Sarmiento promised to adopt a Japanese Spitz-lookalike who is the friendliest of the lot. (PAWS volunteers nicknamed the dog "No. 64," representing her cage number.)

Husband and wife Noel and Ellen Caparros will take two: a black one that looks like a dachshund and a white one that resembles a Bedlington terrier.

Maricar Abis' brother Benjie said he would visit the pound this week to give a home to at least one of the dogs.

This reporter has decided to bring home a white whippet-like mongrel, long-legged with brown spots. This dog stares at humans, seemingly asking them to take her home. Now her wish is granted.

There is a pure white mongrel that constantly shakes in fear. There are many other dogs waiting to be freed or to find their owners or a new home.

Those wanting to adopt a dog may visit the Marikina City Animal Protection and Control Office, which is open on Mondays for such arrangements. You may also check out your own city veterinarian or dog pound. Or you can call the PAWS headquarters at 724-6395, or e-mail readmypet@yahoo.com.

Possible "foster parents" as well as owners wanting to claim their lost pets are charged a P200 fee.

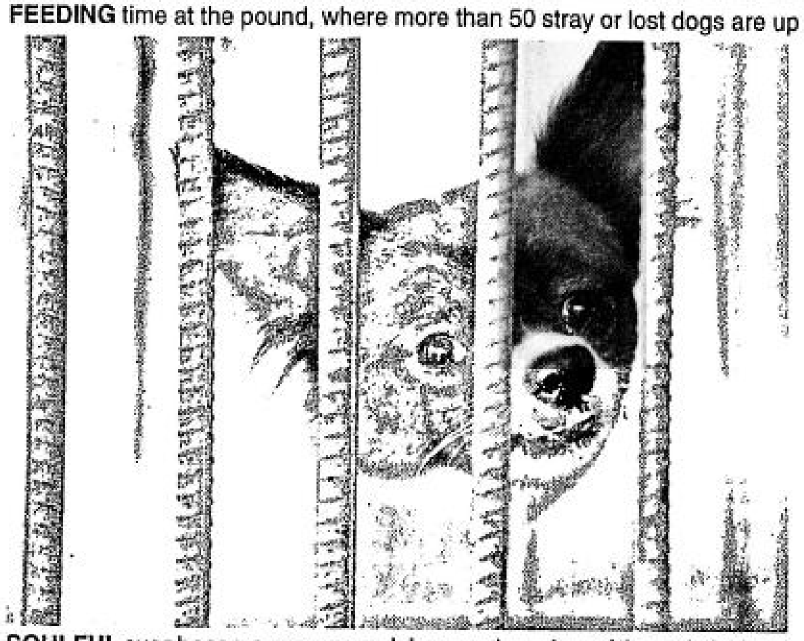
Asked how they make sure that the claimants are the real owners and not dog traders or eaters, Puro said: "Those claiming a dog have to sign some papers. And after one week, we visit the address indicated and check out if the dog is still with them."

Before you bring a dog home from a pound, be sure that he or she gets the necessary vaccinations (for rabies, distemper and parvo). The PAWS can help find veterinarians that administer these shots at a discounted rate.

In this season of peace and goodwill, wouldn't it be nice to come home with a dog happily wagging his tail at the sight of you? *With a report from Georgina C. Ortiz*

FEEDING time at the pound, where more than 50 stray or lost dogs are up for adoption.

ERNIE SARMIENTO



SOULFUL eyes become even more dolorous when viewed through the bars of a cage.

ERNIE SARMIENTO

WAITING game: This well-scrubbed dog is waiting for its old owner—or even a new one.

NOEL CAPARROS

Lacson cases pushed despite Ador ouster

(From page A1)

of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Isafp), said Mawanay was not their sole witness concerning Lacson's alleged money laundering and drug trafficking activities. He said the matter actually depended on the Senate, which was looking into the charges.

"There are others who will testify. Maybe someone will surface tomorrow," he said in a phone interview.

Mawanay himself promised to produce damning evidence against ranking police officials of the Estrada administration and pleaded with the Department of Justice to reconsider its decision last week to drop him from the WPP.

"Even without the support of the government, I'll still be a witness . . . as long as I'm alive. That's my responsibility," he said.

But he is concerned about his family's safety, thus the need for the protection afforded by the program, he said.

Mawanay and Dante Jimenez, president of the Volunteers against Crime and Corruption, visited the DOJ main office on Padre Faura Avenue in Manila yesterday morning but found no one there except for the security guards because of the extended holidays.

Jimenez said they had intended to talk with WPP director Leo Dacera to plead Mawanay's case.

The DOJ had decided to drop Mawanay from the WPP because of his alleged swindling activities while in Isafp custody. Mawanay earlier told the INQUIRER that he was preparing to leave the safe house to which he was assigned but that a Malacañang official who asked not to be named publicly told him to stay put until the "issues" had been sorted out.

Lacson yesterday said he had received reliable information that Rigoberto Tiglao, spokesperson for President Macapagal-Arroyo, was the Malacañang official in question.

"He (Tiglao) has gone out of his way, as a presidential lapdog who must bark to earn his bone, to coddle a self-confessed criminal and be a trainer-keeper," said Lacson, who is allegedly keeping in banks overseas hundreds of millions of dollars amassed from drug trafficking, kidnapping and smuggling.

"I think they deserve each other. And since they are deserving of each other, they might as well enjoy each other's company for the rest of their lives," he added.

To this, Tiglao said: "*Bakit ako* (Why me)? I don't personally know him (Mawanay)."

Tiglao said it was up to the justice department and Isafp to decide whether Mawanay should remain as state witness.

Embarrassment

The WPP's Dacera refused to comment on Mawanay's plea to be given a second chance.

But Dacera claimed that Mawanay, an ex-civilian agent of the defunct Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force formerly headed by Lacson, was using the WPP "as a shield" and was "an embarrassment to the program."

Jimenez said the DOJ should reconsider its decision for the sake of Mawanay's family.

"We are (raising) human considerations," Jimenez told reporters. "Our primary concern is Mr. Mawanay's safety and that of his family. It is the No. 1 consideration. Mr. Mawanay can be killed any time, just like his fellow civilian agents who have been murdered . . . but not his two boys and his wife."

Jimenez said Mawanay's alleged swindling activities should be treated separately from his testimony.

"The allegations are personal," Jimenez said. "They were private transactions between him and some businessmen. He will face them in court through his lawyer. He's willing to pay all obligations. (But) there was no crime yet. Allegations must be proven. These are separate cases."

Jimenez also said Mawanay "knows a lot" and "has a lot to tell as regards (the allegations against Lacson)."

Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño had earlier said Mawanay was booted out of the WPP because of the numerous complaints filed against him in connection with his buying and selling of cellular phones while in his Isafp safe house at Camp Aguinaldo.

Zuño said Mawanay should take care of himself now. "But we're giving him time to find another place (that could provide him protection)," Zuño said.

According to Jimenez, Mawanay is barred from talking with reporters, especially on the Lacson cases.

"He can't talk because it will be a violation of the DOJ rules (on the WPP)," Jimenez said. "We must follow the rules (even though his coverage was already terminated) because we are asking for a reconsideration."

Jimenez said the sudden decision of the DOJ to drop Mawanay had discouraged other witnesses.

"They are now afraid, unwilling to talk and come out," he said. "They fear for their lives with the way the DOJ treats its witnesses."

Ghost

"People in Malacañang are so afraid of what Mawanay can do to them after the Isafp and DOJ dropped him like a hot potato for his crimes," Lacson said. "The ghost they have created is now haunting them."

He said Tiglao's alleged decision to defend Mawanay was motivated by the latter's earlier threat to crush him. "Using Mawanay?" the senator said. "He (Tiglao) should come up with something originally his."

Lacson had also earlier suggested that Corpus be expelled from the Isafp because his witness Mawanay had "fooled" the nation.

Asked by a defense reporter to comment, Corpus declined. "Let's not talk about this at this time," he said. "I have been advised by my lawyers that I should comment only at the proper forum. There will be a Senate hearing in mid-January."

Sen. Rodolfo Biazon said Mawanay had lost not only his value as a witness in the Senate investigation but also his credibility in view of his alleged swindling activities.

But Biazon said Corpus' supposed error in judgment in presenting Mawanay as a witness should not be used as the only basis in assessing his performance as Isafp chief.

He said that if Corpus should be removed from the AFP because of Mawanay, so should the police officers responsible for using witness Philip Medel Jr. in the investigation of the murder last month of actress Nida Blanca.

Medel, who had confessed to the crime, retracted his confession soon afterward.

"And if we follow that as a basis, then no one would be left in the PNP (Philippine National Police)," Biazon noted.

Biazon also said Corpus should be judged based on his whole performance as Isafp chief, which the senator described as a failure.

He cited the Isafp's lack of intelligence capability in crushing the Abu Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New People's Army.

Tiglao said he was aware that the DOJ wanted to drop Mawanay because no case had as yet been filed against Lacson based on the witness' allegations.

However, Tiglao said, Corpus still wanted to keep Mawanay in government custody despite his supposed computer hacking to get at Lacson's alleged bank accounts.

Tiglao said that while they were leaving the decision up to the DOJ, "we hope that whatever contribution (Mawanay makes) to attaining justice will be considered."

No right

Another witness against Lacson, Mary Ong alias Rosebud, said it was the senator who should be booted out of the Senate "because he has done more harm than good to this country, and he can do more harm."

Ong was reacting to Lacson's reported challenge that all witnesses against him be dropped from the rolls.

"May I remind Senator Lacson that I am also a complainant against him, not a mere witness," Ong told the INQUIRER yesterday.

She said Lacson had "no right" to demand her ouster from the WPP. "Let him leave the Senate first, then I will voluntarily leave the WPP," she said.

Ong filed charges of kidnapping, drug trafficking and murder against Lacson last January and May with the Ombudsman and the DOJ. She was admitted into the WPP last July.

She claims to have first-hand information about kidnapping and drug trafficking activities involving Lacson and several PNP officials starting in 1993 up to November 2000. ***With reports from Dona Z. Pazzibugan and Christine Herrera***

$3-M civil case filed vs Ping in US

(From page A1)

Over the years, the volume of the order was reduced to 31,262 pairs of handcuffs, but by August 1999, the transaction remained unconsummated. That month, according to Pelaez, Lacson approached her "to obtain her support and endorsement in his campaign for chief of the PNP" and to assure her that he would effect the payment if he won the appointment.

Pelaez charged that Lacson did not make good on his promise for "personal political reasons."

The court gave Lacson 30 days upon receipt to file "a typewritten response" to the summons. Pelaez's counsel, Rodel Rodis, forwarded a copy of both the summons and the complaint to PNP Director General Leandro Mendoza, NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco and Justice Secretary Hernando Perez, with a request for them to serve the summons.

Original plan

Corpus, who has accused Lacson of money laundering, issued a challenge to the senator to "deny under oath before the US court" that he did not have dollar deposits abroad.

"That was the original plan, for Pelaez to file a case, when the team went to the US in June this year. But this time, Pelaez is doing it on her own. We welcome the filing of the case against Lacson," Corpus said.

Corpus said he believed that as Pelaez's case prospers, the US court could compel the banks to release Lacson's bank records.

"We are not pinning our hopes too high on this case, but this could help in the uncovering of Lacson's dollar deposits abroad," Corpus told the INQUIRER.

In her eight-page complaint, Pelaez claimed that Lacson assured her in one meeting that he would resolve the payment of the handcuffs, amounting to P15.67 million.

Sometime in November 1999, Pelaez said, Lacson and his aide Raymond Burgos met with her at Sugi Restaurant in Greenhills, San Juan. Lacson, just appointed PNP chief at that time, allegedly promised that she would be paid her commission if she would help him in the "cleansing, overhauling and eradication of unwanted elements in the PNP."

In that meeting, Lacson reportedly asked her to file charges against the 123 officials of the PNP who had approved the Smith and Wesson contract, "so that he could have them all removed and replaced by his people, whose trust and loyalty to him were unquestioned."

When she refused because those officials had, in her view, performed their duties properly, the complainant claimed that Lacson allegedly ordered the PNP to stop any payment to her.

Pelaez claimed that Lacson also threatened to "blacklist" her from future participation in bidding and to disqualify her as PNP supplier if she failed to pay the taxes and duties on the handcuffs, despite the Senate and the Ombudsman's decisions in her favor not to pay such duties and taxes.

"Even though he knew that Smith and Wesson was entitled to the payment for the handcuffs which were delivered to the Philippines and the plaintiff was rightfully entitled to receive her commission, Lacson refused to do so for personal political reasons," the complaint read.

"He required that plaintiff must first file charges against the 123 military officials whose ouster he sought in order to replace with his own loyalists."

Pelaez also filed a slander case against Lacson for saying before Filipino community groups in the San Francisco Bay Area (Oakland, San Mateo and Contra Costa) that Pelaez had "smuggled" the handcuffs into the Philippines.

"Scam artist *na*, smuggler *pa*," Lacson allegedly told the gatherings in reference to Pelaez.

She claimed that Lacson's conduct was "intentional and malicious" and allegedly done for the purpose of causing her to suffer humiliation, mental anguish and emotional and physical distress.

Anomalous contract

Yesterday, Lacson tried to set the record straight.

"My only participation in that deal was when I disapproved payment for the handcuffs after I deemed it disadvantageous to the government if the PNP would shoulder the importation taxes levied upon the shipment which Ms Pelaez's firm brought to the Philippines," he said.

Such an arrangement, he said, was never stipulated in the original contract but merely expressed in a letter of endorsement signed by Lastimoso to then Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno, making the importation taxes exclusive of the original contract price.

"I refused to honor that arrangement because it was highly irregular and anomalous, on top of being grossly disadvantageous to the government," Lacson said.

"In fact, there is a pending case before the Sandiganbayan in connection with the lopsided revision of the contract," he added.

Lacson said he considered Pelaez's move an opportunity to settle the score on Corpus' allegations against him.

"Colonel Corpus is still in dreamland," the senator said. "He has come to a point of believing his own lies about the so-called accounts." *With a report from Cynthia D. Balana*

Strippers also show heart

(From page A1)

but we appreciate the donation," Mallan said.

"We'll bless it and we'll distribute it."

Between 700 and 1,000 parents registered their children for gifts and picked them up on Saturday at the church's ninth annual Christmas Extravaganza.

After discussing the pros and cons of taking gifts that were raised by stripping, church leaders agreed it was best to pass out the gifts as planned, Mallan said.

"There is a tremendous need in the community," she said.

"The stories we've heard are heartbreaking. There are a lot of families who don't have anything."

And it was not only the kids that the strippers made happy. ***AP***

Palace convinced Ramos won't run

(From page A1)

plans, which the 73-year-old Ramos has already denied.

"No, we would be discussing ways to move the country forward," De Venecia said. He said First Gentleman Juan Miguel Arroyo would join the three Lakas leaders in playing golf.

The President is titular head of the Lakas-NUCD-UMPD-Kampi, the country's ruling political party, while Ramos is honorary chair and De Venecia, national chair and chair of the executive committee.

The 1987 Constitution prohibits a sitting president from seeking reelection. It is silent, however, on whether, once out of office, a former president can run again.

Tiglao noted the lack of a court decision clarifying the ambiguity. "There are questions but there is no ruling."

But he said the Palace knew that Ramos was content with his role as "a salesman (traveling) all over the world selling the benefits of investing in the Philippines."

"We believe that he is very happy with being a private citizen," he added.

He also rebuffed insinuations that Ramos was the one instigating rumors of a military coup against the Macapagal administration.

"Never, never has ex-President Ramos been linked to any coup talks," Tiglao said. "It's beyond his character."

Tiglao said Ms Macapagal does not believe that Ramos will engage in any activity that will destabilize her administration.

"President Ramos has been a very staunch constitutionalist," he stressed.

He also pointed out that "there are no conditions at all for a coup" to begin with.

"At this point, a coup is out of the question. We should move on and stop talking about coup rumors," Tiglao said.

Testing the waters

"It's possible that he (Ramos) is testing the waters," Biazon told reporters. "Maybe not today, but maybe in 2004."

Biazon said he met Ramos thrice recently. Each time, he said, Ramos would always assure the senator that he was not running again.

Biazon, like Ramos a former chief of staff of the Armed Forces, said it was "unusual" for Ramos to be repetitive in his denials and to be shaking the hands of almost all the people he meets.

He also said there were groups in the Lakas party floating the idea of Ramos as a stronger alternative to Macapagal.

"There is an alternative being developed for a leader who is stronger than President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is perceived to be under the influence of religious groups, under pressure from civil society and under the guns of the military," Biazon said.

He said that Ms Macapagal was not a strong leader because she was not elected as President.

Saturday meeting

In a phone interview, De Venecia confirmed that the rumors of a second Ramos run were taken up during a meeting in Malacañang on Saturday, with the President, Ramos and himself in attendance.

"It was casually discussed (on) the sidelines of our meeting about unity and the economy," De Venecia said, "because of the rumors. We have to put an end to the negative speculations that Lakas will split."

"I confirm that FVR is not running in 2004," De Venecia added. He said he had received a phone call from Ramos the day his denial came out in the INQUIRER.

"He was wishing me a happy birthday and saying he is sincere in his declaration that he is not going to run for President," De Venecia said in a phone interview from Dagupan. The Speaker turned 65 yesterday, with the President joining him for lunch at a seafood restaurant in Bonuan Beach on her way to Baguio.

He said it was he who brought up the topic during the Saturday meeting. Ramos, the country's chief executive from 1992 to 1998, immediately denied any reelection plans.

"President Ramos is very straightforward," the Speaker said.

De Venecia said he then proposed that if Ms Macapagal ran for president in 2004, Ramos could serve as her "general campaign manager and I would be the campaign spokesman."

He said the two Presidents smiled.

Too early?

When De Venecia was asked who the party's presidential candidate in 2004 would be, he replied: "We have no candidate yet but more or less it will be Gloria."

Asked if this means that Lakas was open to other candidates, he said: "It's not that but it's too early to start the process because we still want to solve the pressing problems of our country and to keep the economy back on track."

De Venecia said Ms Macapagal herself shuns discussions of her plans for 2004.

"That (her running) would be the normal assumption but the President does not want to discuss politics now because she is focused on reviving the economy and solving the peace and order problem," De Venecia said.

"It's not wise to say now that Gloria is the Lakas candidate because then all our actions will be suspect and we would be accused of politicking," De Venecia said.

"But most likely, if she wants (to run), the party will rally behind her, but it's too early to be saying that now," De Venecia said.

He said he had proposed that Lakas hold a meeting in the first three months of the coming year to discuss this among other issues.

De Venecia hailed Ramos as "one of the most outstanding leaders in Southeast Asia."

"He is an asset to the party," he said of his province-mate.

Asked if he thought Ramos would be a good candidate for 2004, he said instead: "But he already said he will not run."

De Venecia, who ran for president in 1998 with Ms Macapagal as his running mate, said he himself had "no more plans to run for president."

"I have already declared early on that I am not aspiring for a higher office anymore. I have no excess agenda and that is probably why I am effective as a Speaker," he said.

De Venecia won the speakership by a landslide margin, with 180 of the 212 House members voting for him.

He said his role for 2004 would be to "help Gloria turn the country around" by supporting her legislative agenda.

The President, he said, is also supportive of his own legislative proposals.

He said the President mentioned in a TV interview that she was hoping the "brilliant and strategic ideas" of the Speaker would be implemented.

De Venecia had proposed a rent-to-own scheme for nearly half a million idle government housing units, as well as the large-scale securitization of government's nonperforming assets.

De Venecia said he was glad the President attended his birthday celebration on two consecutive days.

On Christmas Day, when De Venecia marked his natal day in advance at his Dasmariñas Village residence in Makati City, the President mingled with senators, congressmen, justices and a host of public officials and businessmen.

En route to Baguio yesterday, he said the President stopped for lunch at Matutina, which, he said, was a favorite seafood restaurant of the President's.

Brrr! Baguio chills as temperature falls

(From page A1)

It was the coldest Christmas in the last 40 years, according to the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) station here.

And the city's most prominent guest—President Macapagal-Arroyo—should be delighted to hear this piece of good news as the First Family spends its Christmas holidays at the presidential mansion.

The First Family and some Cabinet officials are staying in the city until the New Year.

"It is going to be a beautiful week for the President since our weather has been good for the past days. This week, we do not see any weather disturbance," said weather observer Pedro Rigos.

Cold Siberian winds started to sweep through the city on Nov. 26 when the temperature dropped to 9.6 degrees.

Baguio's temperature was 13.4 degrees on Dec. 20, 13.6 degrees on Dec. 21, 11.5 degrees on Dec. 22, 13.8 degrees on Dec. 23 and 12.4 degrees on Dec. 24.

The cold rush in this mountain resort city has driven lowlanders and foreigners to stay here during the long Christmas break, boosting the city's tourism industry.

At the onset of December, almost all the bigger hotels, inns and pension houses were already booked until the first week of January.

Officials at the newly opened Manor at Camp John Hay said more than 100 guests have been occupying their 68 rooms since Dec. 24. All 30 cottages of Camp John Hay were also packed with guests, according to the staff.

Aside from tourism officials, businessmen welcomed the chilly weather as they enjoyed brisk sales of thick blankets, sweaters, socks, leg warmers, shawls and bonnets.

Among the lowest recorded temperatures in Baguio were: 6.3 degrees (Jan. 18, 1961), 6.7 degrees (Feb. 1, 1963), 7.4 degrees (March 1, 1962), 7.8 degrees (Jan. 24, 1993) and 10 degrees (April 1, 1923 and Feb. 4, 1999).

The warmest temperature here was 30.4 degrees recorded on March 15, 1988. ***With a report from Desiree Caluza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau***

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, December 27, 2001
St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

1st Reading: **1 Jn 1:1-4**
Gospel: **Jn 20:2-8**

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala ran to Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved. And she said to them, "They have taken the *Lord* out of the tomb and we don't know where they have laid him."

Peter then set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down and saw the linen cloths lying flat, but he did not enter.

Then Simon Peter came following him and entered the tomb; he, too, saw the linen cloths lying flat. The napkin, which had been around his head was not lying flat like the other linen cloths but lay rolled up in its place. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and believed.

Commentary

In today's gospel, both Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved enter the tomb and see the napkin and linen cloths used to wrap the body of Jesus. But the beloved disciple believes first. What helped him believe first? His intimacy and fidelity to Jesus! He was very close to the heart of Jesus and he remained faithful until the end, standing near the cross of Jesus as he was dying. He developed a special sensitivity to the meaning of the words of Jesus. If you want to understand the words of Jesus, love him and be faithful to him.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

REMEDIAL LAW (CIVIL PROCEDURE)—Complaint; Cause of action—Cause of action is defined as an act or omission by which a party violates the right of another. A complaint is deemed to have stated a cause of action provided it has indicated the following: (1) the legal right of the plaintiff, (2) the correlative obligation of the defendant; and (3) the act or the omission of the defendant in violation of the said legal right. The cause of action against petitioner was clearly established. Respondents were purchased of ready-mix concrete from petitioner. The concrete delivered by the latter turned out to be of substandard quality. As a result, respondents sustained damages when the structures they built using such cement developed cracks and honeycombs. Consequently, the construction of their residence had to be stopped. [Citations omitted.] [Justice Panganiban, Third Division, Philrock, Inc. v. Construction Industry Arbitration Commission, G.R. Nos. 132848-49, June 26, 2001]

DIGEST BY R.B. VERA

Reds to resume peace talks

(From page A1)

FLAMMABLE
No smoking w in 50 ft.
PLS. STOP for INSPECTION

SECURITY at the oil depot in Pandacan, Manila, is tightened as the CPP marks its founding anniversary. ERIK ARAZAS

Rights and the International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL).

Under the agreement, the "revolutionary forces" can go after violators of human rights and international humanitarian law and can take the government to account for violations.

Liwanag said both parties should come to a "mutually satisfactory" comprehensive agreement on social and economic reforms before tackling the question of political and constitutional reforms.

"The NDF (National Democratic Front) will certainly rebuff any scheme of the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) to gloss over the root causes of the civil war and maneuver the NDF into a position of capitulation," he said.

The NDF is representing the CPP-NPA and other progressive organizations in the peace negotiations. The government halted the last round of peace talks in Oslo, Norway, in June after NPA rebels killed Quezon Rep. Marcia Punzalan, Cagayan Rep. Rodolfo Aguinaldo and a Laguna town mayor.

Tiglao told Agence France Presse yesterday that the government needed assurances that the communist leadership could control its guerrillas in the field, saying "it is hard to negotiate if the orders of the central leadership are not being followed by the troops."

The NPA has been fighting since 1969 to establish a Marxist government in the country.

Sison said his guerrillas would not mount attacks on the occasion of the Red party's founding anniversary. He said they would observe a unilateral Christmas ceasefire and hold meetings and "cultural presentations" instead.

Authorities have tightened security in anticipation of an attack.

Sison said he was confident communism was on the upturn despite the end of the Cold War, citing the victory of liberal and "green" parties in Europe and the frequent demonstrations in cities hosting important economic meetings.

Bukidnon

Lt. Col. Jose Mabanta, Philippine army spokesperson, reported that Army soldiers of the 81st Infantry Battalion raided a suspected communist safe house in Barangay Tawas, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, on Monday, seizing a Garand rifle and some personal belongings.

A report reaching Army headquarters in Manila said the raiders, belonging to the battalion's "B" company, and civilian volunteers were earlier informed that a group of armed men were seen in the area.

The armed men, believed to be NPA members, immediately withdrew when they detected the presence of the government troops, the report said.

"This can not be a ceasefire violation because there were armed men in an urban area," Mabanta said.

The government and the Communists called separate unilateral ceasefires covering the Christmas season. The truces simultaneously end on Jan. 6.

An economic slowdown and the resurgence of Moro rebels in Mindanao have allowed the Communists to bounce back in recent years. The military estimates the strength of communist guerrillas at 12,000, about double their number in the early 1990s.

Sison told dxMF Bombo Radyo that the NPA has even solidified its force, spread all over the country, under at least 100 guerrilla fronts "with good leaders."

"These NPA forces are staying at places already known to be NPA territories," he said.

"We are accumulating arms by seizing them in basic offensive operations (ambushes, raids and arrests) against the military, police and paramilitary forces of the enemy," Liwanag said in his statement.

Earlier, AFP chief Gen. Diomedio Villanueva said the communist movement was being torn by conflict among its leaders.

Villanueva also said many rebels have become disillusioned with communism and have surrendered during the past 11 months.

But Sison yesterday said the military was being inconsistent. He pointed out that when the military was proposing its 2002 budget, it cited the "threat from the Communists" as one of the justifications.

"If they want to highlight their propaganda tactics, they would say the NPA is not a force to reckon with, but if they are asking for budget, they claim the NPA is getting bigger," Sison lamented.

In the interview with the Davao City-based radio, Sison criticized President Macapagal-Arroyo for being a "puppet" of the United States and gave her administration a failing grade of "3" on a 1-10 scale.

"*Walang pagbabago sa gobyerno* (The government has not changed)," he said.

Liwanag chided the President for projecting "an image of obsequiousness to the military by repeatedly flattering them, yielding to demands for more funds and placing the GRP-NDF peace negotiations in the hands of Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes."

He claimed that the United States was "secretly grooming" Reyes as Ms Macapagal's successor.

Liwanag claimed that such "debilitated" image of the President "is conspicuous even as she sometimes poses as a tough commander-in-chief by issuing bellicose statements and by aping (US President George) Bush in pushing the so-called anti-terrorist line."

She was "practically in the clutches of Reyes and similar militarists who pushed (then President Joseph) Estrada into an all-out war policy against the Filipino people and the Bangsamoro," the CPP chair charged.

"They have placed her in the position of condoning and encouraging violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and yielding to the militarists what should be her initiative in the GRP peace negotiations with the NDF," he said. ***Reports from Anthony A. Allada, PDI Mindanao Bureau; Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau; Martin Marfil in Manila; and Inquirer wires***

Urban rebels mark CPP founding

BY MA. DIOSA LABISTE
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—Urban Communists, their friends and members of allied organizations of the clandestine National Democratic Front (NDF) in Panay island celebrated the 33rd anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) with a "pot luck" lunch yesterday.

The gathering, held somewhere on the outskirts of the city, was attended by some 100 persons who brought food and P50 worth of gifts for "Kris Kringle."

The half-a-day affair was low-keyed so as not to attract attention in the neighborhood. There was no singing of revolutionary songs or waving of red flags with hammer and sickle.

The group had only the traditional reading of greetings and messages, which were sent mainly through Short Messaging System (SMS) and e-mail.

Highlight of the occasion was the reading of the 11-page message of Armando Liwanag, CPP Central Committee chair and believed to be the pseudonym of party founder Jose Maria Sison.

Hiligaynon

Written in English, the document, titled "Hail the Rising Revolutionary Forces and the Upsurge of the Mass Movement," was translated in Hiligaynon for the benefit of farmers and urban poor activists who were present.

The reading was also interspersed with songs to perk the audience up toward noontime.

Generoso Delgado, head of the CPP's local urban party committee, said the last 10 years saw a significant growth of the revolutionary movement in Panay as a result of a "rectification campaign" that the party has waged since 1991.

"In 1998, we stabilized the revolutionary organization and recovered what we have lost in terms of territories and warm bodies. The first few years were difficult but we can now look back and say we had overcome," he said.

Delgado, however, said revolutionary forces in Panay were still not successful on all fronts because their armed group, the New People's Army, has yet to make a headway in launching offensives against government troops.

He said Panay was more "quiet" than other regions and provinces in the country.

What came close to an offensive of local guerrillas was the killing of two "informers" in the mountain town of Igbaras, 30 kilometers from here, on Dec. 19.

Eight armed men shot dead Alberto Alfaro Jr., 48, and Domingo Eucare, 45. The NPA, however, has yet to issue a statement claiming responsibility for the killing.

Security threat

Delgado's sober assessment of the insurgent movement stood in contrast to that of military authorities that consider the rebels as the "single threat to the region's security."

In a peace and order briefing in November, Chief Supt. Rolando Garcia, police director in Western Visayas, said the insurgents' presence was felt in 220 of the 4,048 barangays in the region. The figure rose by 172 or 358 percent from last year's record.

Garcia expected the CPP-NPA activities to step up next year even if peace negotiations were in place.

Delgado said local Communists welcomed the resumption of peace talks next month.

"Peace talks or no peace talks, the revolutionary movement will continue its work to expand its reach and influence as well as launch military offensives against its enemies," he said.

GMA . . .

(From page A1)

"how to translate our survival skills into development in the coming year."

"Workers are the key to development. That's why we will dedicate the year 2002 to our Filipino workers. We should be proud of them," she added.

Presidential spokesperson Rigoberto Tiglao, however, had a more glowing assessment of Ms Macapagal's first year in office.

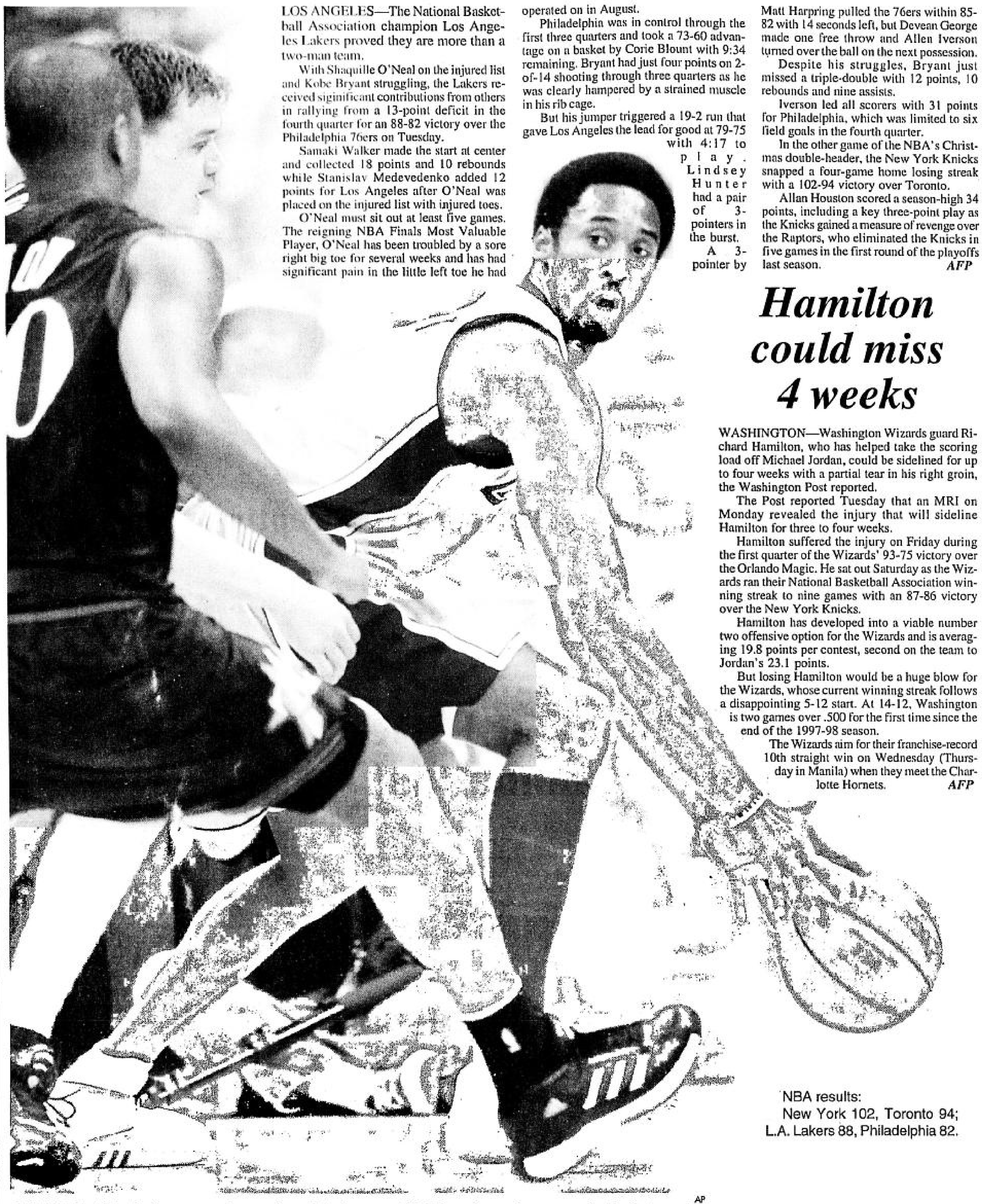
"It has been a tumultuous year . . . There were many threats to our democracy and economy. What's good with this Christmas is we survived with flying colors," Tiglao said.

He said the country could have ended up like Argentina had Estrada stay on in office.

"What happened in Argentina was they could not handle the economy and there were political threats. But in our case, I think all's well that ends well," he added.

For his part, Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho said the Philippines had successfully detached itself from ill effects of the economic crisis gripping Argentina. ***With reports from Dona Z. Pazzibugan and AFP***

Lakers more than a 2-man team



LOS ANGELES—The National Basketball Association champion Los Angeles Lakers proved they are more than a two-man team.

With Shaquille O'Neal on the injured list and Kobe Bryant struggling, the Lakers received siginificant contributions from others in rallying from a 13-point deficit in the fourth quarter for an 88-82 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Tuesday.

Samaki Walker made the start at center and collected 18 points and 10 rebounds while Stanislav Medevedenko added 12 points for Los Angeles after O'Neal was placed on the injured list with injured toes.

O'Neal must sit out at least five games. The reigning NBA Finals Most Valuable Player, O'Neal has been troubled by a sore right big toe for several weeks and has had significant pain in the little left toe he had operated on in August.

Philadelphia was in control through the first three quarters and took a 73-60 advantage on a basket by Corie Blount with 9:34 remaining. Bryant had just four points on 2-of-14 shooting through three quarters as he was clearly hampered by a strained muscle in his rib cage.

But his jumper triggered a 19-2 run that gave Los Angeles the lead for good at 79-75 with 4:17 to play. Lindsey Hunter had a pair of 3-pointers in the burst.

A 3-pointer by Matt Harpring pulled the 76ers within 85-82 with 14 seconds left, but Devean George made one free throw and Allen Iverson turned over the ball on the next possession.

Despite his struggles, Bryant just missed a triple-double with 12 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

Iverson led all scorers with 31 points for Philadelphia, which was limited to six field goals in the fourth quarter.

In the other game of the NBA's Christmas double-header, the New York Knicks snapped a four-game home losing streak with a 102-94 victory over Toronto.

Allan Houston scored a season-high 34 points, including a key three-point play as the Knicks gained a measure of revenge over the Raptors, who eliminated the Knicks in five games in the first round of the playoffs last season. *AFP*

NBA results:
New York 102, Toronto 94;
L.A. Lakers 88, Philadelphia 82.

BRYANT (right) looks for an open teammate as Eric Snow and Matt Harpring apply pressure in the first quarter. AP

Hamilton could miss 4 weeks

WASHINGTON—Washington Wizards guard Richard Hamilton, who has helped take the scoring load off Michael Jordan, could be sidelined for up to four weeks with a partial tear in his right groin, the Washington Post reported.

The Post reported Tuesday that an MRI on Monday revealed the injury that will sideline Hamilton for three to four weeks.

Hamilton suffered the injury on Friday during the first quarter of the Wizards' 93-75 victory over the Orlando Magic. He sat out Saturday as the Wizards ran their National Basketball Association winning streak to nine games with an 87-86 victory over the New York Knicks.

Hamilton has developed into a viable number two offensive option for the Wizards and is averaging 19.8 points per contest, second on the team to Jordan's 23.1 points.

But losing Hamilton would be a huge blow for the Wizards, whose current winning streak follows a disappointing 5-12 start. At 14-12, Washington is two games over .500 for the first time since the end of the 1997-98 season.

The Wizards aim for their franchise-record 10th straight win on Wednesday (Thursday in Manila) when they meet the Charlotte Hornets. *AFP*

RP athlete proclaimed gold winner in javelin

IT'S official: The Philippines' Dandy Gallenero won the men's javelin throw gold medal in the 21st Southeast Asian Games in Kuala Lumpur last September.

Gallenero was unanimously proclaimed winner by the Southeast Asian Games Federation Executive Committee in its meeting last Dec. 20 in Kuala Lumpur after gold medalist Thirdsak Boonjansri of Thailand was disqualified for failing a drug test.

Gallenero's winning mark was 67.14 meters, way ahead of Myanmar's Kyaw Swar Moe (64.48m) and Thailand's Sanya Buathong.

Another athlete—Thailand's Chom Singhoi—was declared gold medalist in weightlifting (men's 62kg category) when original winner Gustar Juni Anto of Indonesia tested positive for drugs.

Discuss thrower Wansawang Sawusdee of Thailand was likewise stripped of his silver medal for failing the drug test. Duong Enxin was awarded the silver, making it a 1-2 finish for Singapore since Wong Tuck Yim James had bagged the gold with a heave of 56.93 meters.

Philippine Olympic Committee board member and Philippine Football Federation president Rene Z. Adad attended the SEAGF meeting which was chaired by Tunku Imran ibni Tuanku Ja'afar, president of the Malaqysian Olympic Committee.

The disqualified athletes have been asked to surrender their medals on or before Jan. 20, next year. The other athletes whose medals were affected by the disqualification also have to return their medals to their respective NOCs (National Olympic Committees) during the same period in order to get the correct prizes.

"Both Thai and Indonesian representatives, who were present during the meeting, apologized to the SEAG Federation," Adad explained.

Gallenero's gold—the ninth in athletics—boosted PATAFA president Go Teng Kok's stock as the country's biggest sports achiever this year.

Lipa 4-cock tilt tomorrow

THE SECOND round of the 4-cock circuit of the United Cockers Association of Batangas will be held tomorrow at the Mataas-na-Kahoy Cockpit in Lipa City.

Sonny Lagon and Pete Rodriguez, sponsors of the event, have sacrificed their slots so that the proceeds of today's derby may be used by the Ucab members.

Among those who have confirmed their participation are Patrick Antonio, Pol Estrellado, Ramon Manzanares, Gov. Ito Ynares, the team of Mayor Jojo Binay and Vice Mayor Nestor Mercado, Judge Roberto Diokno, Vic Yu, Mario Villamor, Tito Reyes, Anthony Marasigan and Jake Macasaet.

Weights between 1.8 to 2.4 lbs. may be submitted between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. at the Mataas-na-Kahoy cockpit on the day of the derby.

Fights will start promptly at 7 p.m.

Hopman Cup

PERTH, Australia—Argentina's US Open quarter finalist Mariano Zabaleta will replace suspended countryman Guillermo Coria in the Hopman Cup tennis tournament starting tomorrow, competition director Paul McNamee said here.

Zabaleta, 23, stepped in after Coria was suspended until March by the ATP after testing positive to the banned steroid nandrolone.

McNamee said Wednesday Zabaleta's manager, Rafael Grappo, had confirmed the availability of Zabaleta, ranked 60th in the world.

"Mariano approached me at the US Open and asked if he could play, but I had to say no then because we had already given a commitment to Coria," McNamee said. *AFP*

Magic-Pacers game tonight on NBN-4

SOLAR Entertainment will telecast tonight's (Thursday, Dec. 27) NBA game pitting Orlando Magic and their young, exciting star Tracy McGrady, against the Indiana Pacers, 10 p.m. on NBN-4.

After only four years in the NBA, the 22-year-old McGrady has already become one of the league's most versatile players. He averages 26.0 points/game, fifth-highest in the NBA, as well as 6.8 rebounds, 4.8 assists and 1.9 steals, which are good enough for many to consider McGrady to be among the top five players in the league and reminiscent of Scottie Pippen during his prime.

The Pacers have won their last two games, and both victories were showcased by the emergence of 23-year-old Jermaine O'Neal, who, like McGrady, joined the NBA straight out of high school. O'Neal scored 39 and 38 points, respectively, against Cleveland and New Jersey.

News Corp steals yachting lead

SYDNEY—Round-the-world yacht News Corp upstaged her bigger rivals to take the early lead in the Sydney-Hobart race on Wednesday as boats left Sydney Harbour under a heavy pall of smoke from bushfires around the city.

News Corp, an Australian entry and one of eight state-of-the-art Volvo-class 60 feet (18 meters) yachts in the race, took the early honors in very light conditions which left some of the 75-boat fleet becalmed not long after the start.

But the bigger boats, including defending champion and pre-race favorite Nicorette of Sweden, were making up plenty of ground as they headed out to sea for the 630 nautical mile race south down Australia's east coast.

Nicorette and local maxis Australian Skandia and Brindabella were expected to reel in the smaller boats as they sailed into stronger southwesterly winds that are forecast to dominate for much of the race. *Reuters*

'Galleros' derby at Roligon today

EXCITING battles of cockfighting giants will be witnessed today with the holding of the 5-Cock Galleros de Manila Inaugural Derby at Roligon Mega Cockpit in Parañaque City.

This breath-taking encounters of feathered gladiators will be participated in by members of the Ucap and NCA, two of the most prestigious groups of cocker-breeders in the country, and the Galleros de Manila headed by Iking Araneta.

Among those who confirmed their participation in this derby are Cavite International Derby champion, Pol Estrellado, Biboy Enriquez, Ucap president Butch Macasaet, Joey delos Santos, NCA president Gov. Ito Ynares, Blondie Tolentino, Mayor Ashley Arayata of Tanza, Cavite, Jun Marasigan and many others.

Members of the Galleros who will give the others a run for their money are Jhun Gerochi, Emoy Gorgonia, Peter Uy, Boy Marzo, laweyer Joey Mendoza, Dr. Jovy Oligane, Tiny Meneses, Carding Ng, Gerry Perez, Buddy Robrigado, Ryoichi Saito, Col. Senosa, Rigor Sepcaio, Emitt San Juan, Nestor Suatengco, Jomari Hilario, James Uy, Edwin Recio and others.

Hosts Francis Lumunsad, Matt Carbonell, Bobby Doromal, Carding Ng and Emitt San Juan said for an entry fee of P11,000 the champion will get a guaranteed cash prize of P500,000 in this derby sponsored by Ninja Game Fowl Feeds.

Promoter Danny "Showdown" Ty announced that rules of the derby will be strictly implemented without exception.

He also said tickets will be on a "buy-one, take-one" basis until 7 p.m. only,

Ty said that fights start at exactly 4 p.m. if there will be 80 entries. For inquiries and cockhouse reservation call Tiling, Fred or Rezel at 833-16-38 or 833-22-75.

AEROBICS WINNERS

Philippine Sports Commissioner Cynthia L. Carrion (center), former president of the Philippine International Competitive Aerobics Federation (Picaf), is shown with medalists of the World Sports Aerobics Championships held recently in Long Beach, California, USA. From left are Jon Noblejas, April Sanchez, Glenn Toscano, Alaine Buenaventura, Picaf president Ley Fernandez, Commissioner Carrion, May Click, 2-time gold medalist Len Len Rius, Joseph Regala, Melvin Brillantes and Karen Villanueva.

Cavite tourney slated

THE CAVITE Councilors' League 2001-2004 headed by President and Rosario town three-time topnotch Councilor Jose Rozel 'Jhing-Jhing' E. Hernandez, will hold the 1st CCL 3-Cock Derby at the Agilahas Cockpit Arena, La Gallera de Tanza, Tanza, Cavite, tomorrow.

The derby weighing time will start from 8 a.m. to 12 noon. Entry fee is P5,500, while minimum bet is P3,300. The derby will start exactly 7 p.m.

Aficionados coming from the ranks of the CCL who have confirmed their participation are Trece Martires City Councilor Felixberto "Kabo" Lontoc, Amadeo Councilor Rene Tongson, Mendez Councilor Rodel Bacos, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo town Councilor Berting Glean, Boardmember and SKF President Cocoy Mendoza.

Derbyist from nearby provinces and peripheral cities are invited to participate in the event hosted by CCL derby Chair and Maragondon Councilor Nolito 'Pogi' Magallanes and Provincial Boardmember Jhing-Jhing Hernandez.

For information call or text 0919-81305775 and 046-438-1990.

'Coach Ron takes good care of himself'

By Dennis U. Eroa

SAMBOY Lim, who once electrified the basketball public with his gravity-defying moves toward the basket, yesterday said he was shocked and saddened over what happened to national team mentor Ron Jacobs.

"It came as a shock because coach Ron takes good care of his health," said Lim, many-time veteran of international competitions, including the 1986 team under Jacobs that won the ABC Championships in Ipoh, Malaysia.

Lim said he was praying hard for Jacobs' recovery.

"Questions regarding coaching must be set for a while. It's too stressful. Coach Ron needs to recover."

Lim said he would ask doctors to allow him to visit Jacobs at St. Luke's Hospital where the American coach is confined.

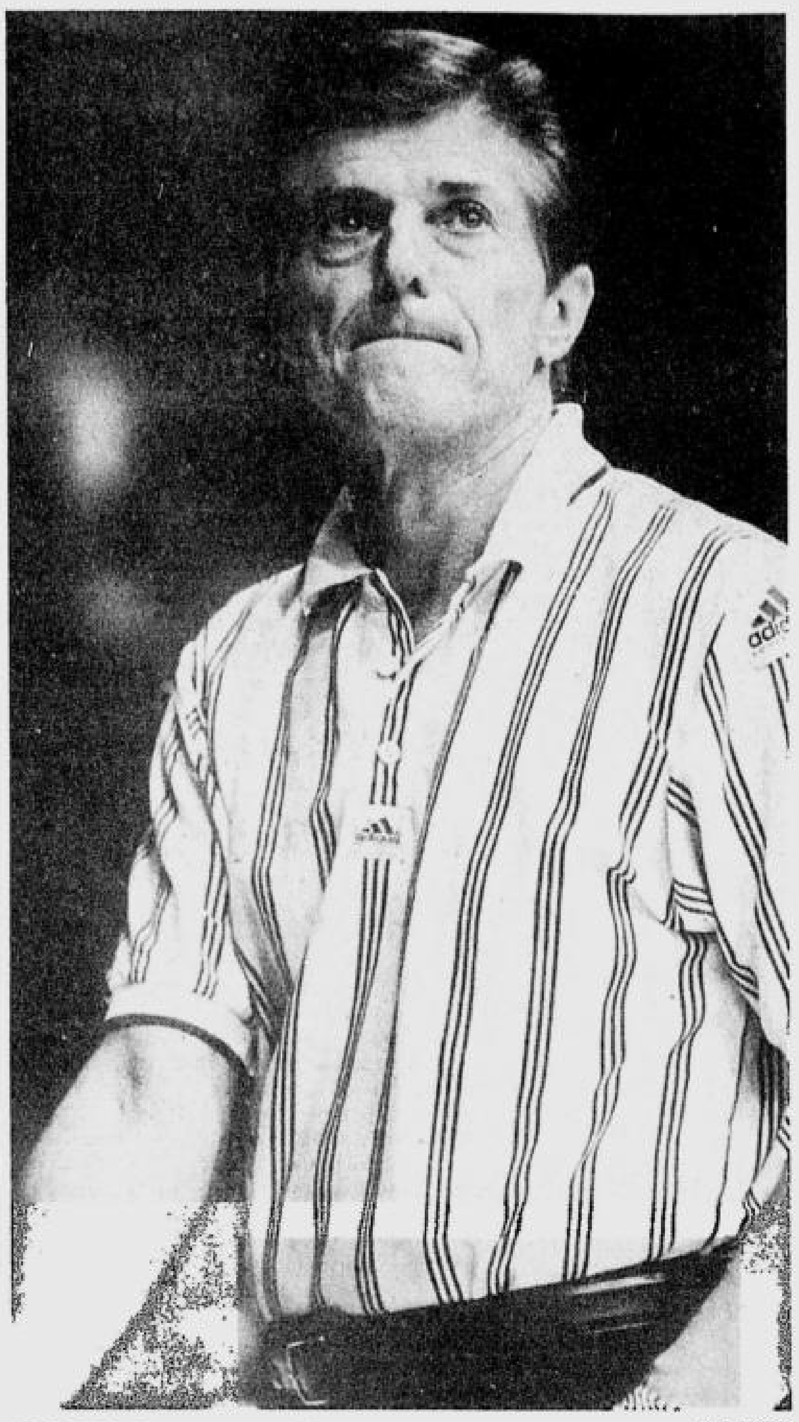
Now 39, the six-foot-one Lim was a bonafide Jacobs' protege. He first played for the multititled Northern Consolidated squad. His contemporaries included Allan Caidic, Hector Calma, Yves Dignadice, Franz Pumaren, Jerry Codiñera, Jeffrey Graves, Louie Brill, Pido Jarencio, Teody Alfarero and the late Alfie Almario.

" Coach Ron also taught me the finer points in life. He stressed responsibility on and off the court," Lim said.

Lim is married to a Batangueña lawyer connected with the Quisumbing and Torres Law Offices. They have a 4-year-old child named Jamie.

Dubbed as the "Skywalker," Lim caught Jacobs' attention while lifting Letran College to the NCAA title in the early '80s. Lim rose to fame rapidly but his career was cut short with an assortment of injuries while donning the colors of San Miguel Beer in the PBA.

Lim presently works as sales and marketing manager of Welcoat Paints, a bemedalled team in the PBL. After making a short-lived comeback two years ago as a Paintmaster, Samboy now acts as Welcoat team consultant.



JACOBS: Prayers pour his way.

FILE PHOTO

Jacobs remains national coach

Ill-stricken American mentor on his way to recovery–Bernardino

By June Navarro

BERNARDINO

RON Jacobs will remain head coach of the Asiad-bound Philippine basketball team.

This was announced yesterday by PBA Commissioner Jun Bernardino.

Jacobs, who turns 59 today, was hospitalized Sunday after a stroke.

"He's on his way to recovery," said Bernardino. "He will remain to be the coach of the national team. But of course, prayers do help so let's just pray for Ron's speedy recovery."

Hospital officials at St. Luke's where Jacobs was taken denied yesterday they had admitted Jacobs.

A certain Ronald Jimenez, claiming to be an admitting officer of the St. Luke's Medical Center in Quezon City, said records belied claims that Jacobs was confined at St. Luke's.

"Records show that there wasn't any endorsement made on behalf of Mr. Jacobs," Jimenez told the INQUIRER.

But the INQUIRER confirmed through three doctors who hold clinics at St. Luke's that Jacobs remained confined at the hospital's ICU (intensive care unit).

A resident physician of the hospital told the INQUIRER he went to the ICU to confirm Jacobs' presence.

Jacobs' name was not listed in the hospital's registry books upon the request of his relatives.

Serge Alombre and Art Cuevas of San Miguel said they had yet to receive confirmation of Jacobs' status.

Bernardino said the PBA is not inclined to think about replacing Jacobs, stressing that the league is looking at the situation with a positive eye.

"Right now, we just hope for the best and it is farthest from our minds that Ron can't coach the national team," said Bernardino.

Draft starts accepting applicants

THE PHILIPPINE Basketball Association Commissioner's Office opens today and tomorrow to accept applications for the 2002 Draft slated on Jan. 13 at the Glorietta in Makati.

A staff that will accommodate all walk-in applicants has been tapped during this Christmas break with the deadline set at 5 p.m. tomorrow (Dec. 28).

Close to 20 have applied for the Draft, including what many see is a bumper crop of Fil-Foreign players who have sent feelers and inquired about the Draft.

Local-born players who are interested must make sure they satisfy any of the following: a.) at least 23 years old b.) a high school graduate at the end of the 1998 school year c.) or a college degree holder.

Fil-foreign applicants must also be able to satisfy any of the three requirements stated above aside from being able to submit a Department of Justice confirmation of their citizenship on or before Jan. 8, 2002.

Inquiries can be coursed through tel. 638-1815 to 17 or interested parties can personally go to the PBA at the 3rd floor, Building A, Philsports Complex Meralco Avenue in Pasig City.

AIM Masters tees off today at Riviera; FVR leads hitting of ceremonial balls

FERNANDEZ

THE AIM Masters tees off today with former President Ramos leading more than 50 corporate teams at the Langer course of the Riviera Golf and Country Club in Silang, Cavite.

Ramos will be joined by Sec. Eduardo Ermita, NGAP president Rod Feliciano and Mizuno top honcho Benny Gopez in the hitting of ceremonial balls.

The tournament, the first invitational amateur golf tournament hosted by the Alumni Association of the Asian Institute of Management, aims to generate funds for its social and civic development projects, according to AAAIM executive director Admiral Luisito Fernandez (ret).

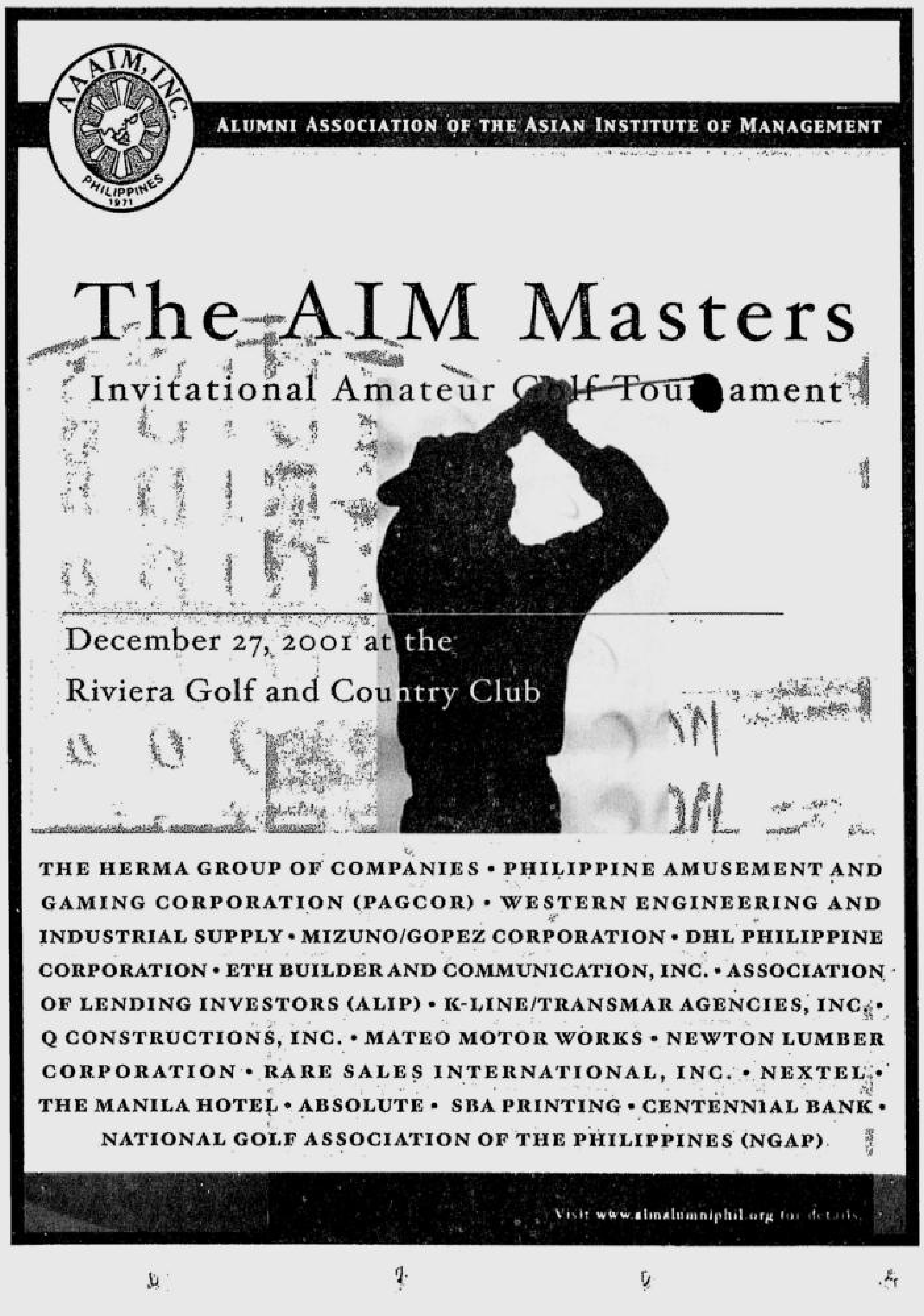
AAAIM chair Laarni J. Goseco said that among the tournament's beneficiaries are The Laura Vicuna Fondation and The Center for Community Transformation, two organizations known for their concerns over the welfare of street children and the underprivileged.

The AIM Masters expects to enhance fellowship among alumni, sponsors and guests, and to help develop and promote amateur golf in the country.

At stake are The AIM Masters-Team and individual championship trophies.

Additional awards will be presented to champions in six different categories, including the ladies and seniors divisions.

The traditional golf tournament raffle will likewise be held at the fellowship dinner where singer Jun Polistico and other stage personalities will provide entertainment.



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Facing facts

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

FACTS that are not frankly faced have a habit of stabbing us in the back.

That is not mine. That is Thomas Carlyle's.

When you avoid the truth, you will surely stumble. Try telling a lie and chances are you will stammer. Or grope for words. The knife sinks deep when falsehood is peddled thick. It's been said many times that fact is the opposite of fiction.

As I said, it saddened me to know that Ron Jacobs has been felled by a stroke. Ron's so nice a man that I can't bear to think he's down. Seemingly, some of his friends, if not relatives, have tried, continue to try, to hide his true condition. Can't blame them. Some people have the tendency to turn a blind eye to reality. They are of the weak of heart.

But I'm gladdened by the news, coming from PBA Commissioner Jun Bernardino, that Ron is on the way to recovery. Thank God for that.

Those who called me up yesterday—and there were lots—said they were praying for Ron's speedy recovery. One call was from someone who just recovered from the stroke that struck Ron.

"I pray to God he is doing well," said the man. "I prayed harder that he can continue to coach the national basketball team."

Before I retired on Tuesday night, I said a little prayer for Ron.

While Jun's gesture of clearing the air was commendable enough, I hope San Miguel Corporation, Ron's employer, would come up with a medical bulletin. That way, we would not be left in the dark as to the true condition of Ron, the nation's favorite cage tactician.

As to St. Luke's official line(?) that it had no patient named Ron Jacobs, let's leave it at that. The hospital was merely following orders.

■

I'm sure John Blanche and Lewis Rissman were already up and about at the crack of dawn today. Reason? They needed to ensure that not even a minor hitch would mar the launching of the AIM Masters Invitational at Riviera's Langer in Silang, Cavite.

Golf's famous "Mutt & Jeff" tandem are known trouble shooters when it comes to handling tournaments of championship proportions.

AIM (Asian Institute of Management) alumni led by Admiral Luisito Fernandez (ret) and Laarni J. Goseco, take a bow. Your pioneering efforts to hold a civic-oriented tournament should be the model for all. Surely, the beneficiaries of the event, notably the country's street children and the underprivileged, will be grateful forever.

To the tournament supporters, may your tribe increase.

German tops local netter

GERMAN Matthias Wolff defeated Daniel Macalino, 8-4, yesterday to reach the second round of the boys' 12-under division in the 2001 Milo Junior Tennis Cup and Regional Workshop at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Also advancing were Paul Papa, Mario Espidido, Homer Perez, Patrick Arevalo, Leyan Moncera, David Sylvester, Tomic Apacible, Jopy Mamawal, Christian Canlas, John Quinatadcan, Gerard Ngo, Gilbert Alza, Johnwill Baldonado and Jeffrey Villanueva.

In the boys' 18-under division, Ian De Guzman outplayed Julianito Jopia, 8-5, to forge a quarterfinal showdown with Borgs Solpicio, who scored an 8-2 victory over Joseph Arcilla.

In the boys' 14-under category, Arithmetico Lim downed James Murrell, 8-2, and Hamza Macapendeg outclassed Gian Aguila, 8-1, to gain quarterfinal slots in this event organized by the Children's Tennis Workshop and supported by Adidas and Sports Kids.

Booking quarterfinal berths in the unisex, 10-under were Bambi Zoleta, who beat Gilbert Aiza, 8-0; Sarah Jane Lim, who clobbered Joan Opulencia, 8-1; and Joseph Baldonado, who won by default over Edwin Olivarez.

First-round winners in the boys' 16-under class were Arithmetico Lim over William Murrell, 8-2, and John Inri Grafe over Sire Cruz, 8-6, while in the girls division were Melissa Orteza, Kristel Samala and Julie Base.

Age group netfest begins Dec. 29

REGISTRATION is now going on for the Philta/Head-Penn Age Group Tennis Championship slated Dec. 29-31 at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Deadline of entry is on Dec. 28 at 12 noon to be followed by the draw at 2 p.m.

Events on tap are boys' and girls' 18-under, 16-under, 14-under, 12-under and unisex 10-under divisions.

Players may register with Loida Mallare at the Philta office (tel. 525-64-34). Entry fee is P200.

Kournikova chases elusive win

AUCKLAND, New Zealand —Christmas was not a big diversion for Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova as she chases the first tournament win of her career.

"She is a professional, Christmas is no big deal," her father Sergei said as he watched his daughter going through her paces under the watchful eye of her mother and coach Alla at the Stanley Street courts in Auckland on Wednesday.

Kournikova arrived on Monday morning, a week ahead of the ASB Bank Classic, and had her first session on court within hours of arriving. She was back twice Tuesday and again Wednesday, and will repeat that routine on Thursday.

The 20-year-old Kournikova, who has never won a WTA tournament title, has supplemented her court work with running in Auckland's Domain.

After a brisk warm-up Wednesday, in which she was on one side of the net and New Zealand top-10 players Jacob Olsen and Mark Thompson on the other, she played two full sets with the pair alternating every two points.

"She hits the ball harder and flatter than I had imagined," said Olsen, the New Zealand 18s champion. "I thought it was going to be easier than it was out there."

Kournikova opted for Auckland ahead of Australia's Gold Coast—the only other tournament on the WTA Tour next week—because she has played the Australian tournament in the past.

The tournament's other big drawcard, Spain's Conchita Martinez, is due in Auckland on Friday. *AP*

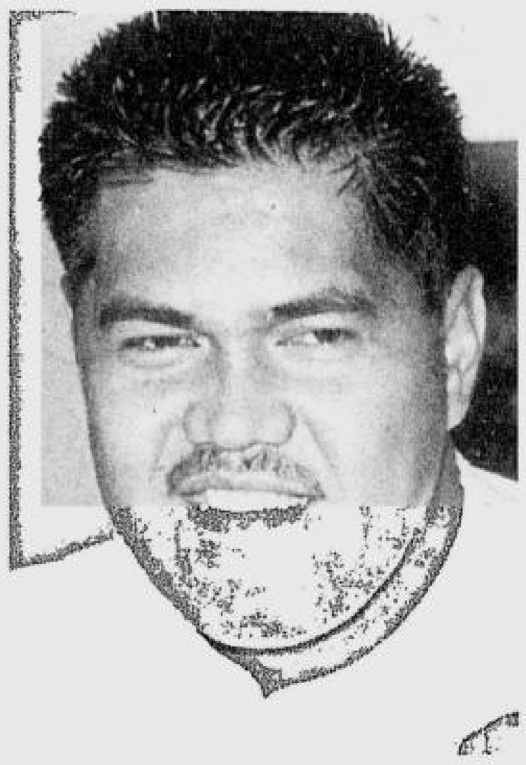
SPORTS

AL S. MENDOZA, Editor ▪ EDWIN M. VILLANUEVA, Assistant Editor

Sering, Andrada hit smear drive vs Go; Jalasco scored

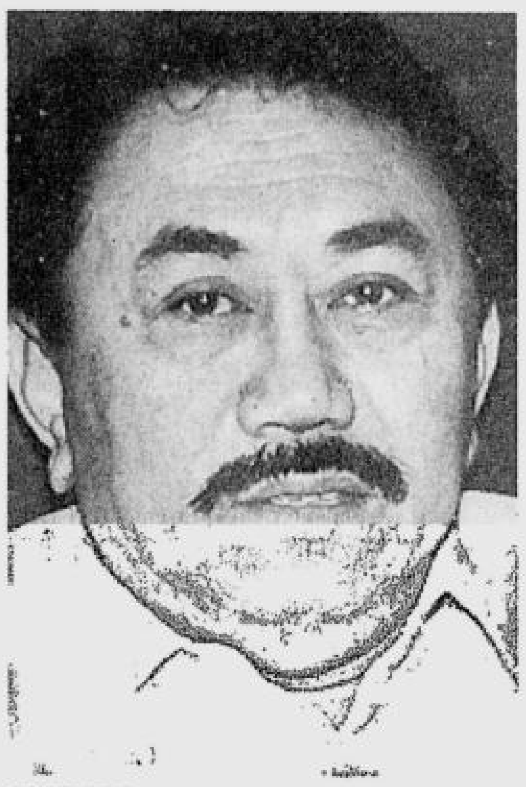
By Marc Anthony Reyes

SERING



JALASCO

GO



ANDRADA

FORMER Philippine Olympic Committee president and athletics association chair Jose Sering yesterday asked the POC ethics committee to junk its probe on athletics boss Go Teng Kok.

He said he was also questioning the motive of Go's accuser, former basketball chief Freddie Jalasco.

Buddy Andrada, president of the Philippine Tennis Association, also came to Go's rescue.

Sering, who served as POC chief from 1984 to 1992, said Go's alleged link with convicted drug lord Yu Yuk Lai is beyond the ethics committee's function and should "be addressed by the POC general assembly itself."

He said the ethics committee's probe has "no leg to stand on because there's no criminal case filed against Go."

Sering said Go had admitted in court that Yu is his friend and the court took cognizance of the fact that Go did not influence Yu's investigation by the authorities.

"Matter of politics"

"What can a mere civilian like Go Teng Kok do to influence the court's decision?" said Andrada. "There is a difference in ethical standards for a government and a civilian person."

Sering also described the probe as "a matter of politics," saying that while Go is a friend of Yu's, it doesn't, in any way, "tarnish his stature as Philippine Amateur Track and Field Association president and a POC general assembly member."

In a letter on Dec. 19 addressed to Go, POC ethics committee chair Rene Cruz, who is a former POC president, asked Go to explain his links with Yu as requested by Jalasco.

Jalasco had said Go "should be punished for dragging" the POC and Patafa into the case.

"Mr. Go's actions as far as Yu Yuk Lai is concerned is only as part of his duties as a friend whose help was sought," said Sering in his reply to Cruz. "At that instance, she was not yet found guilty of any crime."

"He (Go) has not even hinted as president of Patafa but was only identified as such by the media. His action as sports official was only heightened by the fact that Patafa has won more medals for the POC in the last Southeast Asian Games."

Andrada's lament

Sering said the POC should have commended Go for steering his association to SEA Games success, winning nine golds, 10 silvers and four bronzes, instead of trying to smear his name.

Andrada shared Sering's sentiments.

He said the POC committed a "human rights violation" against Go because "there wasn't any case filed against him to begin with.

"In fact, Go can easily file a case against the POC for putting his name in a bad light," Andrada said.

Sering also asked the ethics body to probe the motive of Jalasco, who retained his post as POC executive committee member even after he was dislodged by Tiny Literal for the Basketball Association of the Philippines presidency.

"He (Jalasco) does not even have the personality to report the case before you (Cruz)," said Sering. "His position was only given to him by reason of politics. The truth of the matter is that a person without an NSA cannot be a member of the POC."

RACING TIPS

AT SANTA ANA
BY MR. 999

Race 1—1. Do It David 2. Color of the Wind 3. Isabel's Gossip

Race 2—1. Rock's Dragon 2. Sky Wind 3. Test Run

Race 3—1. Kayang Kaya 2. Real Material 3. Mr. Speaker 4. Count Your Blessing

Race 4—1. Bari Bari 2. Harvesting Game 3. Picardy 4. Like A Prince

Race 5—1. Gun Express 2. Double Check 3. Golden Prince

Race 6—1. Snake Prince 2. Togsi's Ambition 3. Ong Bee/Two Thumbs Up

Race 7—1. The Warrior 2. Spinning Bullet

Race 8—1. Shower of Stars 2. Deputy Royale 3. Gold and Dollar 4. Man of the Hour 5. Green Buck 6. Lorna

Race 9—1. Hong Kong Girl 2. Intunda 3. Yoko Lady

Race 10—1. Native Talent/Southern Skies 2. Standout 3. Ableskiver 4. Traktora 5. Ray Moon

Race 11—1. Rain Check 2. Johann Song 3. Pinagpala 4. Judicial System 5. Arya Girl

Race 12— 1. Daseldurf 2. Grand Prize 3. Sand Splash

Race 13—1. Guguy's Legacy 2. Redding Drive/Walang Hanggan 3. Imus Emperor 4. Hong Kong Treasure 5. Taskmania 6. Food Security

SPORTS ON TV

COMPILED BY
LORENZO MANGUIAT

POOL: World Pool League 2001 at 12 noon (r – 8:30 p.m.) on ESPN

BASKETBALL: US NCAA - Brigham Young vs Stanford at 1 p.m. (r) on ESPN

NBA – Indiana Pacers vs Orlando Magic at 10 p.m. on NBN 4

NBA - Toronto Raptors vs New York Knicks at midnight (r) and Philadelphia 76ers vs LA Lakers tomorrow at 2:30 a.m. (r) on ESPN

GOLF: PGA National Car Rental Classic, Final Round at 2 p.m. (r) on Star Sports

PGA - The Players Championship, Third Round at 11:30 p.m. on Star Sports

BLAST FROM THE PAST

TODAY in 1996, Manila Football Club beat Enze Football Club in penalty shootout, 5-4, to snare the Jose Arnaiz Memorial Football Cup at the Ateneo de Manila. Also today in 1987, Betong Reynes defeated Roger Adolfo, 262-197, to rule the men's division of the Mandaue-Consolacion Bowlers Association in Mandaue City.

U.S. BASEBALL YEARENDER

Arizona Diamondbacks stun the world

By Lorenzo Manguiat

MCGWIRE

RIPKEN

SCHILLING

JOHNSON

ONE cannot deny the fact that both the American and world landscapes were rocked by the Sept. 11 tragedy brought about by terrorists' suicide attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

Yet, the games went on as they did in Major League Baseball and it was just fitting that fans were treated to one of the most unforgettable seasons ever.

The 2001 season saw the emergence of the Arizona Diamondbacks, who, in only their fourth year of existence, stunned the highly favored New York Yankees in a classic seven-game World Series to win their first championship.

The D-Backs could have easily folded after the Yankees, who have 27 titles tucked under their belt, had come back to lead the series, 3-2, following consecutive ninth-inning comebacks in Games 4 and 5.

However, instead of being demoralized and intimidated by the Yankees, the National League champions bounced back to win the title in dramatic fashion via Luis Gonzales' RBI single in the ninth inning of Game 7.

The Series was highlighted by the masterful pitching of Arizona's Randy Johnson and Curt Schilling, who rightfully shared postseason MVP honors.

In terms of individual accomplishments, San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds led the pack as he obliterated Mark McGwire's home run record established just two years ago.

Bonds hit 73 home runs, eclipsing McGwire's 70, on his way to winning his fourth NL MVP award.

While Bonds continued his dominance in the NL, a new star was born in the American League.

Ichiro Suzuki, the first position player from Japan to play in the major leagues, capped off a spectacular season by winning both the AL MVP and Rookie of the Year awards, in the process helping his Seattle Mariners top the AL West.

The 27-year-old Suzuki, who led the AL in batting average, hits and stolen bases, became only the second player since Boston's Fred Lynn in 1975 to win both MVP and top rookie honors.

The season also saw the Baltimore's Cal Ripken Jr., San Diego's Tony Gwynn and St. Louis' Mark McGwire, three certain future Hall of Famers, bid farewell as each announced their retirement for different reasons.

Ripken and Gwynn, who were among the few remaining players to play for just one team, decided that it was time to let the younger generation take over. Meanwhile, the big-hitting McGwire saw his career cut short by an assortment of injuries suffered over the past two years.

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SMART
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METRO

LOUIE C. CAMINO, Editor

Holiday trash threatens to swamp Metro Manila A18

MACAPAGAL

Christmas wore a bloody face

•Man shoots brother

BY NELSON FLORES AND AGNES DONATO

CHRISTMAS did not stop a man from shooting his brother in Antipolo City, and another man from stabbing dead his drinking buddy in Quezon City. Lorenzo Gatlabayan, 56, a cousin of Antipolo City Mayor Angelito Gatlabayan, and a resident Tagbak Slawis Street, Barangay San Jose, Antipolo City, is in critical condition at the Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Memorial Medical Center after his older brother Jose shot him in the chest, police said yesterday.

The older Gatlabayan escaped after the shooting.

Investigation showed the brothers were arguing about some personal difference at about 1:30 a.m. yesterday when the older Gatlabayan pulled out a handgun and shot

MAN/A18

•Pa slain before son

BY PHILIP C. TUBEZA

DRIVER Antonio Artillero, 34, was stabbed dead in front of his seven-year-old son while they were on their way to a Christmas party on Tuesday night.

Artillero, a San Miguel Beer Corp. driver and resident of 314 Katuparan St., Building 13, Vitas, Tondo, Manila died after several men, one of whom was identified as a certain Virgo, repeatedly stabbed him, said investigator SPO3 AC Salazar, of the Western Police District-homicide section.

The victim's son and his brother-in-law, Marco Garcia, who was also with Artillero, were unhurt in the melee.

Witnesses described Virgo as around 40 years old, muscular, dark complexioned, and having big eyes.

PA SLAIN/A18

•He loses life, earnings

TAXI driver Marcos B. dela Cruz, 48, went to work on Christmas Day to earn some extra money for his family. He did not get a chance to bring his extra earnings home.

Dela Cruz, of 1622 M. Natividad St., Sta. Cruz, Manila, died after the two robbers shot him dead inside his taxi, a Nissan Sentra (with plate numbers PWK 156) in Intramuros, Manila.

Investigator SPO1 Edmundo Cabal, of the Western Police District-homicide section, said the victim had a single gunshot wound on the upper right side of his body.

He said the robbery happened around 7:30 p.m. Tuesday along Gen. Luna Street, in front of the Silahis Center for Arts and Artifacts inside Intramuros.

Witnesses told investigators that they saw Dela Cruz's

HE LOSES/A 18

Maid to prove Korina a liar

BY ALCUIN PAPA

SANCHEZ

NO settlement with Korina Sanchez.

This was the stand made yesterday by Bernardita Inocencio, Sanchez's former housemaid, who has accused the ABS-CBN broadcaster of beating her up last week in Makati City.

This after Inocencio's lawyer said they were still looking into the possibility of adding more cases against Sanchez, particularly violation of certain labor laws.

The maid narrated that Sanchez tried to settle the case with her amicably: "She begged and said 'Maybe we can talk about this. Dala lang ng init ng ulo namin.'"

Sanchez had earlier denied she talked to Inocencio to settle the case.

A visibly piqued Inocencio also told the Inquirer that she would prove Sanchez had lied when the

MAID/A18

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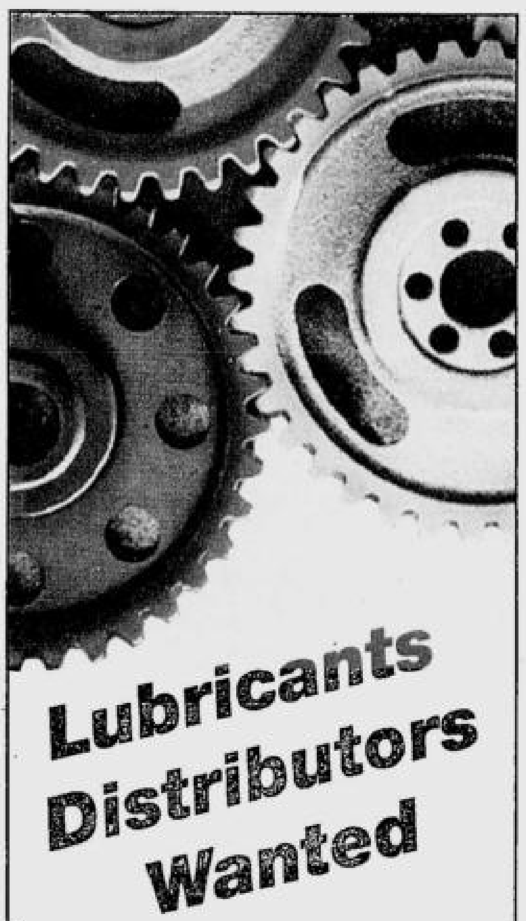

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HONDA

Lovers' quarrel is never funny

By Philip C. Tubeza

JUN G. Gonzales, 26, a part-time clown and magician, did not find it funny when a laborer tried to intervene in his quarrel with his girlfriend. He killed the intruder in Tondo yesterday.

Gonzales, of A. Sandico Street, Tondo, Manila, stabbed dead laborer Ruben Hipolito, 24, of 1180 Lualhati St., also in Tondo, said investigator SPO1 Virgo Villareal, of the Western Police District-homicide section.

Gonzales was, in turn, stabbed and injured by Hipolito's friend, a certain Dimayuga, police added.

He said the stabbing incident happened around 12:10 a.m. near the suspect's house.

Gonzales and his unidentified girlfriend were having a fight while waiting for a pedicab when Hipolito and Dimayuga passed by.

Upon hearing the couple squabble, the two men allegedly teased them to stop since it was Christmas.

The suspect got angry at the unsolicited advice and pulled out a knife. He then lunged at Hipolito, who was surprised and was not able parry the blow.

While the victim collapsed on the pavement, Dimayuga was allegedly able to take Gonzales' knife and then also stabbed the suspect.

Hipolito was taken to the Gat Andres Bonifacio hospital but he died while undergoing surgery.

Gonzales was also brought to the same hospital where authorities caught up with him.

Investigators are preparing homicide charges against the part-time clown.

FVR behind GMA smear campaign

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

NOW, we know who's behind the smear campaign against President Macapagal-Arroyo and her husband Mike. It's either former President Fidel V. Ramos or the people under him.

Despite being exposed for being lies or plain intrigues, the smear job on GMA and Mike Arroyo continues.

Mr. Ramos virtually confirmed he was eyeing the presidential election in 2004 when he belied rumors that he was interested in running.

***

Mr. Ramos is very good at double-talk. When he was still defense secretary, reporters often asked him whether he was running for president. His answer was evasive; when he started kissing babies in public, then probably he might run.

Mr. Ramos is a gentleman in deed: he gets up from his chair when being introduced to a lady or keeps standing while talking to a lady until she tells him to sit down.

But the West Point graduate is not a gentleman when it comes to politics. After he was defeated by Ramon Mitra during the nomination for the presidency at the LDP convention in 1991, Mr. Ramos switched party and formed another ticket. The rest is history.

Now, who would believe a guy who does not keep his word ?

***

Mr. Ramos, whose expertise while he was in the military was intelligence, is good in psywar tactics.

It's very likely he and his people in the intelligence community are behind the smear job on GMA's husband. Mr. Ramos is too much of a gentleman to hit a lady (physically, that is). Since he can't hit Gloria, then Mike gets the mauling.

Mr. Ramos operates in sneaky ways. My sources in the military say he played a big role in ousting President Erap by convincing military top brass to join Edsa II long before the crowd gathered at the historic thoroughfare.

Now, what he did to Erap he's now doing to GMA for different reasons. He was peeved by Erap for always blaming him for the country's ills. In GMA's case, he wants to run again in 2004.

***

The unmistakable mark of *El Tabaco* in the smear campaign against the Arroyos is written all over the place.

The Philippine Consultative Assembly, a self-proclaimed mouthpiece of civil society, is headed by Salvador Enriquez, budget secretary during FVR's term.

Rosemarie "Baby" Arenas is going around town soliciting support for FVR's candidacy in 2004. And who is Ms Arenas? She is FVR's (former) "baby."

***

Joseph Ejercito Estrada had his JEEP before he ran in the 1998 presidential election. JEEP stood for Justice, Economy, Environment and Peace. It later stood for Joseph Ejercito Estrada for President.

Like Erap's JEEP, Mr. Ramos has his RPDEV, which stands for Ramos Peace and Development Foundation.

Supposedly, RPDEV is composed of former Cabinet members, retired legislators, young people and business leaders who support the government regardless of who is president. *Yan din ang sinasabi ni* Erap *sa kanyang* JEEP when it still stood for Justice, Economy, Environment and Peace.

The first two letters in RPDEV could mean "Ramos for President."

***

This early, people in the provinces are already politicking. And one of the early victims of politicking is Commissioner Vicente "Ching" Veloso of the National Labor Relations Commission.

Veloso is a member of a powerful political clan in Leyte. But he swears he is not running for any political office in his province. He is content with his present position in government.

The issue against Veloso is found on Page 16 of the Dec. 17 issue of the INQUIRER. The report said that Veloso's goons drove away 189 farmers from 176 hectares of farmlands supposedly awarded him by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Department of Agrarian Reform.

"I don't own a square meter, much less 176 hectares of land in Tabangohay, Alang-Alang, Leyte *(where the land in question is located—RT)*," Veloso told me.

He said he was never awarded any land by the government in Leyte or any other place, "so how could I have driven out farmers from the land in question?"

I tend to believe Ching Veloso. He is an active lay minister of the Catholic Church. A self-confessed former playboy, Veloso said grabbing land from the poor was never one of his sins.

***

Congratulations to the Bureau of Internal Revenue for its continued success in collecting billions of pesos from the Voluntary Tax Program. That accolade is not from me, it comes from a businessman friend.

My friend, however, decries the indifference of various banks in closing their windows for tax payments at noon. Banks have become the collection arm of the BIR in the tax collection campaign.

"Banks should not close at noon because they are in the service of the public when they are collecting taxes for the government," my friend said.

The deadline for the payment of taxes under Voluntary Tax Program is Dec. 28, 2001. That leaves taxpayers who want to avail themselves of the program very little time.

Holiday trash threatens to swamp Metro Manila

By Christian Esguerra and Alcuin Papa

GARBAGE collectors appear to have gone on a holiday, leaving their "bread-and-butter" to pile up on the streets of Metro Manila.

Less than a week after President Macapagal-Arroyo declared that the garbage problem in Metro Manila has been solved, heaps of uncollected trash are sprouting all over Metro Manila.

Garbage collectors also did not seem to heed the order of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority to work double time and collect the garbage that are sure to hit the streets at the peak of the holidays.

From north to south of the metropolis, sidewalks and main thoroughfares stink with piles of garbage.

In Pasay alone, several portions of the service road of Roxas Boulevard and busy F.B. Harrison Street are littered with unsegregated trash.

Residents apparently remain unmindful of the government's waste segregation and composting campaign.

Rizal Avenue Extension in Caloocan City, particularly the area in front of the Gotesco Grand Central, is strewn with uncollected garbage.

Undisciplined pedestrians and motorists have also made matters worse, adding to the already riotous traffic situation in the congested section of Caloocan.

At the Bonifacio Circle where the MacArthur Highway ends, garbage has been piling up for days.

Earlier, President Macapagal announced that the government had already solved the crisis by providing a "long-term solution" to the problem.

The president said the National Economic Development Authority has already awarded a contract to a firm called Pro-Environment.

On Monday, MMDA chair Benjamin Abalos assured Metro Manila residents that there would be enough personnel to collect and dispose of the tons of garbage that were expected to hit the streets during the holidays.

"I have personally directed the Solid Waste Contractors Association of the Philippines (Swacap) to work doubletime in collecting garbage," said Abalos, who also promised a "garbage-free" Christmas.

Abalos said members of Swacap had already given him an assurance that a sufficient number of collectors would be available for trash collection duties on Christmas and the New Year.

The MMDA official said a backlog in trash collection during this period is "normal and temporary," and is not a cause for concern since there will be enough manpower to do the job.

He added garbage collectors had voluntarily showed up for work on Christmas Day since they were assured they would be paid overtime pay and other incentives.

"They (collectors) will be doing the rounds until the holidays are over," Abalos stressed.

He also said Metro Manila residents need not worry about the garbage problem because the MMDA's brand-new 5-hectare sanitary landfill in Rodriguez, Rizal is nearing completion. The landfill will complement the six controlled dumpsites outside the metropolis of the agency.

After the Rodriguez landfill is completed, another landfill will be constructed in Pililla, Rizal after Malacañang awarded the contract to the Pro-Environment Consortium.

SAD FACE OF THE HOLIDAYS

ERIK ARAZAS

It takes long, tiring hours for long-haul commuters to wait for the bus that will take them home to their loved ones in the provinces, or away from the bustle of the city. Whole families are stranded at terminals, waiting for a ride that never comes on time. This is a sorry scene that gets replayed this time year after year.

Boy dead, woman hurt in fiery Christmas

By Agnes E. Donato and Christian V. Esguerra

A 6-YEAR-OLD boy was killed and a woman was wounded when three fires broke out in Quezon City, Muntinlupa and Las Piñas.

On Christmas Eve, Erwin Espiritu, 6, was killed in a fire which gutted the family shanty on Tandang Sora Avenue, Barangay Old Balara, Quezon City.

Before the fire broke out about 5:30 a.m., Espiritu's grandmother decided to go out, leaving the sleeping victim and his brother in the shack.

The boy's brother, said to be handicapped, was playing with a lit candle when he accidentally knocked it down and triggered the fire, investigators said.

The brother was able to flee, but Espiritu was trapped inside the house, unable to save himself. He died of suffocation and severe burns.

On Christmas Day, dancing firecrackers or "watusi" sparked a fire in Muntinlupa, leaving Reynalda Bugarin homeless and with minor burns.

The fire which started at 4:29 a.m. took six hours to put out, said FO3 Lewis Santos. The fire caused P300,000 in property damages.

Five hours later, the third fire broke out in a house in front of Bloomfield Academy, Las Piñas, said SPO2 Roberto Nullan.

Fire authorities could not determine what caused the fire, which started about 9:30 a.m. in the bedroom of the house owned by a Joel Cruzado. Arson pegged property damage at P5 million.

Maid to prove Korina . . .

(From page A17)

broadcaster accused the maid of qualified theft for a missing bracelet worth some P250,000.

"I won't talk to her (if she wants to settle amicably). I'll face her and I won't run. She shouldn't accuse me of that. But I'll answer those charges. I won't back down from her. If I really stole that, why would I even bother to tell her I was leaving her?" said Inocencio in Filipino.

Inocencio added that she had in fact previously worked as a cook in the households of Federico and Ernesto Lopez, scions of the Lopez family which owns ABS-CBN, but she was never accused of stealing anything then. "If I really wanted to steal valuables from my employers, I should have done it then because they (Lopezes) had lots of jewelry."

Inocencio explained that she left the two Lopez households when she got fed up with the infighting between the other maids. "You can verify my record with my recruitment agency. I have not had any negative record against me."

She added that she wants to pursue the cases against Sanchez to clear her name since people "might think I'm a thief and that's not true."

The maid also revealed that the bracelet Sanchez was referring to was actually pawned. The money was used, Inocencio said, to pay for the treatment of a child who was injured when Sanchez's vehicle figured in a vehicular accident with the FX cab that the child was riding in sometime last Dec. 18 in Pasay City.

Inocencio also denied she was trying to extort money from Sanchez, adding that she was just asking for her one-month's salary which she said she rightly deserved. "I worked very hard for that money. And the hardships came with a lot of curses and insults from her."

Inocencio's lawyer Atty. Mel "Batas" Mauricio also told the Inquirer that he would have his client go through a CAT scan to determine if her brain was affected by the beating she got last week.

Inocencio had been complaining of dullness of sight and pain in some regions of her head. "If the examinations prove there is damage (to the brain) then we will definitely upgrade the charges."

Mauricio has a radio program with GMA-7, a rival network of ABS-CBN.

The Makati City Police Women and Children's Concerns Desk is set to submit today their case of physical injuries to the Makati City Prosecutor's Office for inquest. They were supposed to turn the case in yesterday but there was no prosecutor available.

Lawyer Mauricio added that they would also file a case against Sanchez for violation of RA 1161, otherwise known as Social Security System Law, after he discovered that Sanchez might not have remitted SSS payments in the name of Inocencio. Under the law, housemaids are also entitled to SSS benefits from their employers. The law carries a penalty of six to 12 years in prison.

"We will pursue this (SSS Law) case to serve as a lesson to other employers. We complain about overseas domestic helpers being abused when there are cases right here in our country," Mauricio said.

Inocencio said she asked Sanchez's secretary about the remittances but was told to talk to the broadcaster about it personally. "When I asked her (Sanchez) about my SSS remittances, she just cursed," Inocencio said.

The maid, a native of Romblon and a mother of four, said that working with Sanchez was "bearable" despite the curses and insults that she got. "I got used to her. I understood her. Maybe that's really her way. But there came a point when I couldn't stand it anymore. All the more when Paul (Aquino, Sanchez's alleged boyfriend), started to imitate the way she was treating me. Bastos ang ugali," she said.

Last weekend, Inocencio alleged that Sanchez and Aquino beat her up and forcibly threw her out of Aquino's unit at the Bel-Air Condominium on P. Burgos Street in Poblacion, Makati.

Inocencio had been working for the past two months under Sanchez.

In turn, Sanchez said she was not at the area at the time of the alleged incident. Sanchez added that the maid might be "trying to get back" at her after she filed charges of qualified theft against Inocencio.

Pa slain before . . .

(From page A17)

The investigator said the stabbing incident happened around 6:10 p.m. on Tuesday at the corner of C.P. Garcia and Kalamansi streets in Tondo, Manila.

The victim, his son and Garcia were on their way to a Christmas party when they met Virgo and several other men at the corner of C.P. Garcia and Kalamansi streets.

The suspects, who were allegedly drunk, ganged up on the victim for no apparent reason.

Garcia escaped while trying to protect Artillero's son. The boy nevertheless saw the suspects gang up on his father and stab him four times, thrice in his chest and once at the back.

The culprits then escaped after Artillero fell to the ground. He was rushed to the Mary Johnston Hospital where he died around 7 p.m.

In Taytay, Rizal, a 21-year-old bachelor lost a leg when a gasoline tanker truck driven by a drunken man ran over him on Christmas Eve.

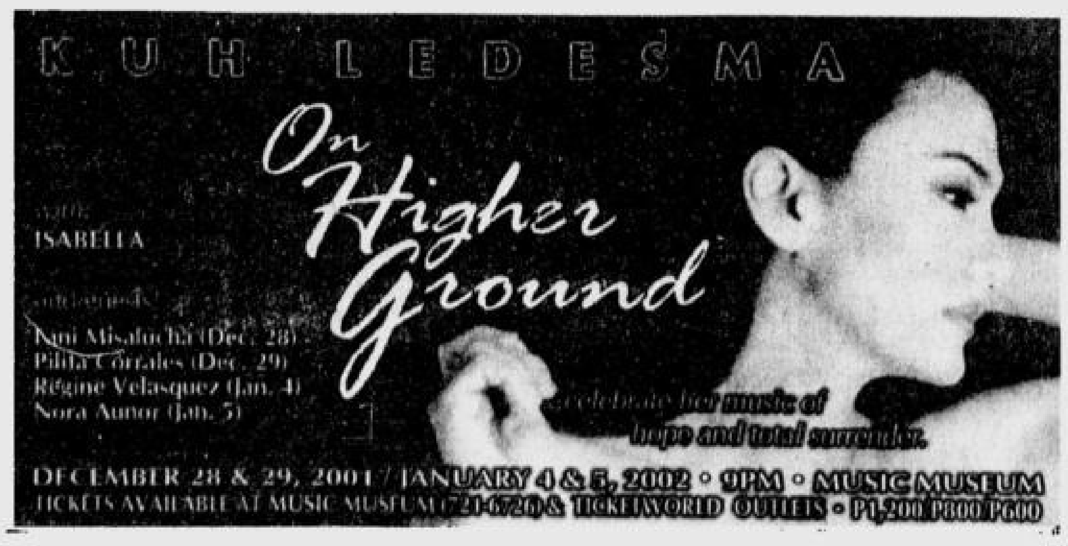
SPO4 Rufino Gatapia, Taytay municipal police desk officer, identified the victim as Joel Gaviola, of 138 Elwood St., Taytay.

The driver, 29-year-old Marcos Catahan, tried to escape but was arrested after he slammed his truck into a concrete barrier in the nearby town of Cainta.

Police records showed that the incident happened about 11 p.m. along Elwood Street in Taytay.

Gatapia said that, due to his intoxication, Catahan lost control of the truck and rammed four vehicles parked along Elwood Street. Gaviola, who was on his way to church, was also hit.

Catahan tried to escape but irate bystanders gave chase and caught up with the suspect in Cainta. *With a report from Nelson Flores*



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Man shoots . . .

(From page A17)

his brother at close range in front of a restaurant on M.L. Quezon Extension in Barangay San Roque.

Antipolo City police investigator PO1 Rodolfo Reyes said that the older Gatlabayan escaped as his brother slumped onto the ground. Bystanders rushed the victim to the hospital.

Reyes told the INQUIRER that he was having a hard time investigating the shooting in the absence of witnesses. He said no one wanted to cooperate with police.

Mayor Gatlabayan, a cousin of the suspect and the victim, has urged police to conduct a thorough investigation.

In Quezon City on Tuesday, a Christmas celebration turned bloody after Sonny Valdez, 26, of Don Manuel Street in Barangay Balingasa, stabbed dead his drinking buddy and neighbor Gregorio Pepito, police said.

Pepito, 40, died from a stab wound in the abdomen on the way to the National Orthopedic Hospital.

Valdez surrendered to local barangay officials and is now facing homicide charges.

Police said the two men, who were both drunk, had a misunderstanding at about 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Their argument became heated and Valdez pulled out a knife and stab Pepito who was declared dead on arrival at the hospital.

He loses . . .

(From page A17)

Alve taxi pull over in front of the Silahis Center.

The witnesses said they heard a gunshot ring out from the taxi. The two suspects then jumped off the cab and ran away, disappearing in the darkness.

Bystanders checked out the taxi and found Dela Cruz drenched in his own blood in the driver's seat. The victim was already dead.

Cabal said investigators have yet to determine the exact amount the robbers had taken from Dela Cruz.

Investigators still do not have a clear description of the robbers. *Philip Tubeza*

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1 (DOLBY EX) BAGONG BUWAN
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 YAMASHITA
4 (DTS EX) TATARIN

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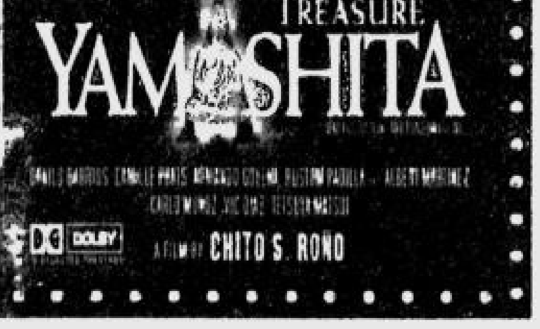

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3 BAGONG BUWAN
4 HUBOG
5 TATARIN
6 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7 DI KA MAREACH
8 BAGONG BUWAN
9 HUBOG
10 DI KA MAREACH

ERMITA 536-7809 TO 12
1 YAMASHITA
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 BAGONG BUWAN
4 DI KA MAREACH
5 TATARIN
6 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7 HUBOG

METRO EAST 632-9115-16 / 633-7641
1 HUBOG
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 DI KA MAREACH
4 YAMASHITA
5 TATARIN
6 BAGONG BUWAN
7 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
8 BAHAY NI LOLA

NOVALICHES 936-3229 TO 31
1 HUBOG
2 TATARIN
3 BAGONG BUWAN
4 DI KA MAREACH
5 BAHAY NI LOLA
6 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7 YAMASHITA
8 BAGONG BUWAN

IMUS (046) 471-0160
1 DI KA MAREACH
2 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
3 TATARIN
4 HUBOG
5 YAMASHITA
6 BAHAY NI LOLA

BACOLOD (034) 441-0453 / 0459
1 YAMASHITA
2 HUBOG
3 BAHAY NI LOLA
4 ROCKSTAR
5 PAGDATING NG PANAHON
6 MUSKETEER

ILOILO (033) 336-8077 / 8078
1 BAGONG BUWAN
2 YAMASHITA
3 HUBOG
4 BAHAY NI LOLA
5 TATARIN
6 ROCKSTAR

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THEATER MOVIE GUIDE

ARANETA CENTER THEATERS 911-3101	
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-1	PAGDATING NG PANAHON
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-2	SUTLA (RE-ISSUE)
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-3 (DDS)	MUSKETEER
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-4 (SDDS)	HARRY POTTER
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-5 (DTS)	EARTHQUAKE
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-6 (DOLBY)	MVP
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-7(DOLBY)	SUMMER CATCH
FARMERS PLAZA-1(DOLBY)	MASAKIT HUWAG IPILIT
FARMERS PLAZA-2(DOLBY)	PISNGI
FIESTA CARNIVAL	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
NEW FRONTIER	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
MANILA	
EASTERN	
MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	MARITAL RAPE / EROTIC DIARIES
ODEON	EARTHQUAKE
ODEON-2	MASAKIT HUWAG IPILIT
ROBEN	PISNGI
TANDEM-1	SEX MEDUSA
TANDEM-2	SEX EDUCATION
TIMES	PUKYUTAN / STORY OF US
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	CLOSED
ACT-4	CLOSED
CORONET-2	ORIGINAL SIN
QUEZON-1	PUKYUTAN
REMAR	PISNGI
REMAR-2	MASAKIT HUWAG IPILIT
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	NAIIBANG HAYOP
B	ALIPIN NG TUKSO
C	
MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA-1	HARRY POTTER
CINEMA-2	THE MUSKETEER
CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	ROCKSTAR
CINEMA-2	MASAKIT HUWAG IPILIT
CINEMA-3	HUWAG KANG KIKIBO
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	THE SCORE
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	MONSTER, INC.
CINEMA-6	OTHER SIDE OF THE LAW
CINEMA-7	SUTLA (RI)
CINEMA-8	PISNGI
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	HARRY POTTER
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	SUMMER CATCH
CINEMA-11(SDDS)	EARTHQUAKE
CINEMA-12	MOST VALUABLE PRIMATE
CINEMA-14	MUSKETEER
CINEMA-15	PAGDATING NG PANAHON
LORES	
CINEMA-2	CLOSED
CINEMA-3	CLOSED
POWER PLANT CINEMA	
CINEMA-1	HUBOG
CINEMA-2	DI KITA MA-REACH
CINEMA-3	TATARIN
CINEMA-4	YAMASHITA
CINEMA-5	FOUR FATHERS
CINEMA-6	BAGONG BUWAN
UNIWIDE METROMALL	
(LAS PIÑAS)	
CINEMA-1	
CINEMA-2	
CINEMA-4	
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARAÑAQUE)	
CINEMA-1	ALIPIN NG TUKSO
CINEMA-2	THE OTHER SIDE OF LOVE
CINEMA-4	ALAMID

Arkdia welcomes New Year

ARKDIA, the latest entertainment venue to open on Remedios st., Malate, will present different bands this week.

Owned and managed by Joseph "Jong" Garcia," Arkdia features Power Jam tonight, Music Network and Soulid on Dec. 28, Blueground, Wency Cornejo and Advent Call on Dec, 29 and Blueground, Domain and True Spirits on Dec. 30.

Helping Garcia manage Arkdia are Rene Trinidad, VP for operations and Chris Sanchez, operations manager. Jun Himeno is the in-house DJ.

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2 DI KITA MA-REACH
3 YAMASHITA
4 BAGONG BUWAN
5 HUBOG
6 TATARIN
7 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
8 BAGONG BUWAN

SM CENTERPOINT
7149522 -7161416
1 YAMASHITA
2 DI KITA MA-REACH
3 BAHAY NI LOLA
4 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
5 TATARIN
6 DI KITA MA-REACH
7 BAGONG BUWAN
8 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
9 HUBOG
10 BAGONG BUWAN

SM CITY FAIRVIEW
9350749
1 YAMASHITA
2 BAGONG BUWAN
3 TATARIN
4 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
5 DI KITA MA-REACH
6 BAHAY NI LOLA
7 HUBOG
8 YAMASHITA
9 TATARIN
10 BAGONG BUWAN
11 DI KITA MA-REACH
12 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)

SM CITY MANILA
5239240
1 DI KITA MA-REACH
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 TATARIN
4 YAMASHITA
5 SUSMARYOEP (4 FATHERS)
6 HUBOG
7 TATARIN
8 DI KITA MA-REACH
9 BAGONG BUWAN
10 BAHAY NI LOLA
11 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
12 HUBOG

SM MEGAMALL
6331901 • 6329401
1 BAHAY NI LOLA
2 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
3 TATARIN
4 HUBOG
5 DI KITA MA-REACH
6 YAMASHITA
7 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
8 BAHAY NI LOLA
9 BAGONG BUWAN
10 YAMASHITA
11 DI KITA MA-REACH
12 HUBOG

SM TUTUBAN
2514302
1 BAGONG BUWAN
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 YAMASHITA
4 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)

DIGITAL dts SOUND DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

SM CITY NORTH EDSA
9295452
1 BAHY NI LOLA
2 HUBOG
3 DI KITA MA-REACH
4 YAMASHITA
5 TATARIN
6 BAGONG BUWAN
7 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
8 BAHAY NI LOLA
9 TATARIN
10 DI KITA MA-REACH
11 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
12 BAGONG BUWAN

SM SOUTHMALL
8068088 • 8006782
1 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
2 BAHAY NI LOLA
3 HUBOG
4 DI KITA MA-REACH
5 YAMASHITA
6 BAHAY NI LOLA
7 BAGONG BUWAN
8 TATARIN
9 YAMASHITA
10 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)

SM GUADALUPE COMM'L
8820905
1 HUBOG
2 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
3 DI KITA MA-REACH

SM CEBU
2313876
1 HARRY POTTER
2 BAGONG BUWAN
3 TATARIN
4 HUBOG
5 YAMASHITA
6 BAHAY NI LOLA
7 MUSKETEER

SM ILOILO
3209422
1 BAGONG BUWAN
2 CLOSED
3 TATARIN
4 HUBOG
5 YAMASHITA
6 BAHAY NI LOLA
7 CLOSED
8 ROCKSTAR

SM PAMPANGA
7128015
1 BAGONG BUWAN
2 TATARIN
3 YAMASHITA
4 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
5 HARRY POTTER
6 BAHAY NI LOLA

SM SUCAT
8294975
1 TATARIN
2 DI KITA MA-REACH
3 BAGONG BUWAN
4 SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)

SM DAVAO
1 MUSKETEER
2 BAGONG BUWAN
3 YAMASHITA
4 TATARIN
5 HUBOG
6 BAHY NI LOLA

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ENTERTAINMENT

LOUIE C. CAMINO, Editor

CINEMANILA 2001

New meanings from old tales

BY GINO DORMIENDO
Contributor

(Conclusion)

LAV DIAZ'S opus, "Batang West Side," is, for the record, three minutes short of the five-hour mark, and the investigative thrust is extended into eternity.

A number of the jurors in the main competition (not in NETPAC where I belonged and where it won our nod) were reportedly at odds on whether the film's inordinate length is justified or not. I, for one, am inclined to agree that it is much overextended, its greater part resembling a telenovela with its mix of melodrama, whodunit, pyschological thriller, and part sociopolitical tripe. The film's remainder is a self-indulgent exercise in filmmaking.

The wispy plot concerns a murder case involving a young Filipino, Hazel Harana (Yul Servo) who, though newly arrived in Jersey City, is found dead one early morning on West Side Avenue. The detective assigned to the case is a fellow Filipino (Joel Torre). Though he claims it is the fifth death involving Filipinos in the city, Mijarez is unable to pin down any suspect. He turns to the murdered man's friends, associates, lover, family and ultimately himself, in an odd mix of visual and dramatic claptrap that aims to unearth the Filipino character's malaise.

I am not about to spill the tale's seemingly unfathomable mystery, though it turns out to be a joke at the end considering the time, logistics and effort wasted on such a petty case. But, considering the rather serious ramifications of the Via Crucis the hapless moviegoer goes through, I must say that the film treads the path of excess, which may be fine for the writer-director but takes its toll on the moviegoer.

Prudence

Diaz, who has set his sights on the bigger arena of international film festivals, must be admonished to exercise greater prudence. Half of the film must be excised since it consists mostly of overextended footage of long walks, indulgent reaction shots, multitudinous lingering scenes that must end up on the cutting floor.

I gather that he has refused to edit his film any shorter, and this arrogance may prove costly at the end.

I also caught the Singapore digital film, "Return to Pontianak" by writer-director Djinn, and found it a perfect clone of "The Blair Witch Project,'' including the device of showing a group of hikers in search of a long-lost Malay village, their ominous trek through the jungle, their desperate battle against the spirits that still roam the forest and the comeuppance they get.

The homegrown digital film "Taxi ni Pilo" by Milo Paz has nothing going for it, since the idea comes directly from a 1998 Japanese film, "After Life," where the dead are ferried to a place, a halfway station, before the journey to the afterlife. For the most part, the film looks like your typical telesine in casting, combining teenyboppers with adults, and the largely claustrophobic setting.

Indulgent

Equally indulgent in style and bereft of a clear vision to steer his film, Evans Chan's "The Map of Sex and Love" struts the distance between clime and countries in order to posit its thesis of three divergent tales to explore history and love, gay and straight. It comes off as neither, with not much history or love coming off at the sordid end.

The CineManila was likewise an occasion to refresh one's memory of the late Ishmael Bernal whose four films were part of a tribute, in a program that paid homage to other directors such as the Thai director Nonzee Nimibutr and the German producer Reghna Ziegler.

Nimbutr was represented by three films he directed plus two he produced. Of the three he directed, I especially like "Nan Nak" (2000) because it captures in his trademark frenzied style the horrors of a classic Thai ghost story.

His new film "Jan Dara" is more staged, much too episodic, and too calculated, leaving me cold with its tale of sexual repression in pre-war Thai society.

Astonishing

Berlin-based Zeigler has been producing for both film and television. Her "Erotic Tales" (a five-part series) was shown alongside "The Year of the Quiet Sun" by the late Krzystof Zanussi.

The first tales are a sharp contrast to Diaz's opus. Within less than half an hour each, they make their point tellingly clear.

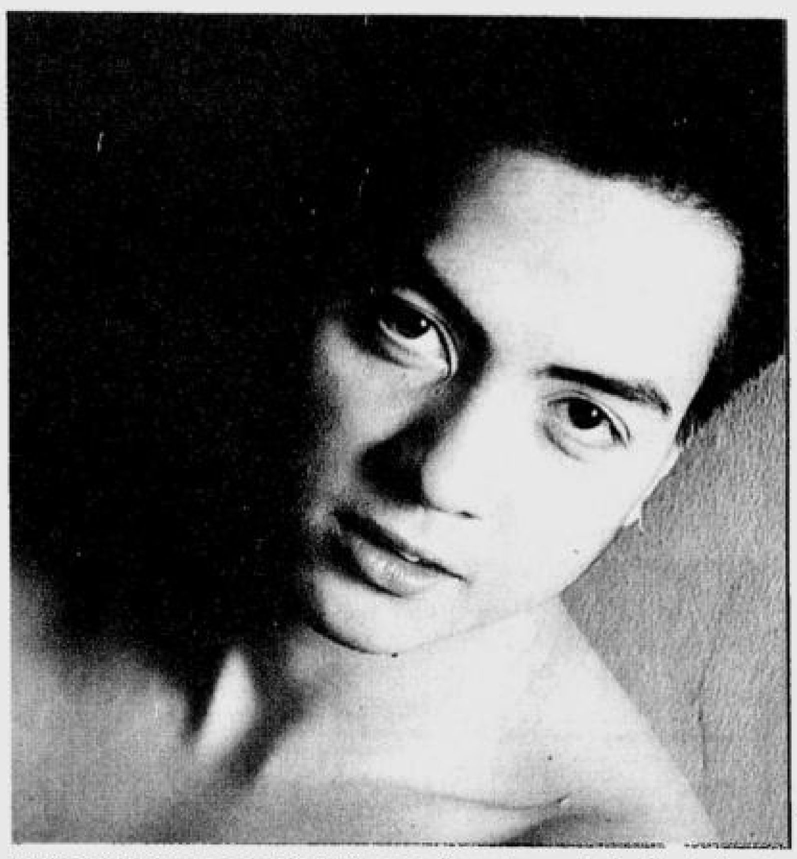
What is astonishing with Zeigler's output is the wide diversity of her pool of directors, ranging from the British Nicolas Roeg of "Don't Look Now'' fame to the American Bob Rafelson, who made the remarkable "Five Easy Pieces."

All in all, CineManila was an event well worth the effort, a cinematic feast that has something for everyone, especially for the local cineastes who have long been deprived of good quality movies from local filmmakers and who have been living on a diet of Hollywood pulp.

We wonder, though, why these people, save for a few who love movies with a passion, chose to stay away from Tikoy Aguiluz's event.

Is it indifference? Envy? Apathy?

Or all of the above? What sore losers some people can be!



WENDELL Ramos gets his first taste of sex-drama in the filmfest entry, "Hubog."

When the going gets daring, Wendell Ramos gets going

BY REMY M. UMEREZ

FOR six long, slow years now, Wendell Xavier Ramos has been a regular figure in the long-running gag show "Bubblegang," always close to the middle of the spotlight but never quite in the middle. Now the 23-year-old with the classical matinee idol looks, gets a chance to be a star and stand right in the very center of spotlight.

It was not an easy climb. He started out as one of the boys in the background (like movie extras), most of the time with hardly a line to deliver. Soon, his patience and ambition started to pay off as he was given spot numbers with star Michael V.

For Wendell this was already a big leap. He also played support in four movies: "Kabilinbilinan ni Lola," "Nagmumurang Kamatis," "Most Wanted: Bira" and "Taguan." Nothing special or outstanding in the roles assigned to Wendell, who was discovered while watching a basketball game at the Ninoy Aquino (Rizal) stadium with his friends.

Then "Hubog" came along. Wendell fit the character of a small time hood as depicted by scriptwriter Roy Iglesias.

The role is not only a challenging acting piece for any actor, it would also require some nudity. Without hesitation, Wendell signed up for the part.

As far as his manager Douglas Quijano is concerned, it is time for Wendell to move on and mature.

Says Wendell: "I thought the story was great. And the director is Joel Lamangan. They could have gotten a more established actor for the role but they chose me."

Of the nudity, he says: "I think the public by now is already used to seeing nude bodies, both male and female, on the screen, so the nude scenes were not a problem for me. In fact, I was willing to do the scene completely naked but the director told me to plaster my private parts."

Did he discuss with co-star Assunta de Rossi how they would tackle their nude scene together? Did she set any conditions?

"There was no discussion whatsoever," he says. "Both of us listened to the instructions of *Direk* Joel and followed them to the letter. I was of course nervous at first because, although Assunta and I have worked together several times before, we have never done anything as daring and intimate as this.

"In a way, it was my baptism of fire. I remember the line, *trabaho lang, walang personalan."*

"Hubog" is one of the seven entries in the ongoing Metro Manila Film Festival. It is the tale of two sisters, one of them an autistic, and pain they suffer in the hands of the men they love.

Wendell pits acting skills with real-life sisters Assunta and Alessandra de Rossi and with Jay Manalo who plays a crime lord's hit man.

According to Lamangan, all four young stars acted well but Wendell, who is a neophyte, is a revelation.

Those who have seen the movie's rushes talk about Wendell being already a shoo-in in the best supporting actor category on the festival's awards night. The boyish actor could only gush, *"Sana magdilang anghel sila."*

Whatever success "Hubog" will bring will not alter Wendell's other plans in life. He is determined to pursue a college education by taking up hotel and restaurant management or business management.

"I am the breadwinner in the family and I cannot depend solely on my show biz earnings," he says.

After his initial taste of sex drama, Wendell is positioning himself as a serious actor who can take on other challenging or even offbeat roles. For starters, he plays the black sheep brother of Dingdong Dantes in the new GMA telenovela, "Sana Ikaw Na Nga."

It is unlikely that he will start a new intimate relationship, says Wendell.

"*Direk* Joel always tells me to focus on my role and that is exactly what I am doing now. I am enjoying the transformation. Finding the right woman and getting married can wait," says Wendell who doesn't hide the fact that he is an unwed father.

Dated histrionics

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

ON GMA 7's "Larawan" recently, brothers **William** and **Albert Martinez** played friends who alternately acted as fathers of the same little girl. As the teleplay told it, Albert and his wife **Liezl** were devastated eight years ago when their baby daughter was spirited away from their home in the middle of the night by the baby's *yaya*.

Years later, the couple was still hoping that their missing daughter would show up one day. No such luck, however. Meanwhile, William and his wife **Yayo** were also childless and, after years of trying, William finally gave up and adopted a cute girl from an orphanage.

He thought Yayo would be happy to finally become a mother, even if it was of an adopted daughter, but he was shocked when she reacted negatively. Her point: William didn't even consult her before making such an important move, and now she was expected to feel motherly toward a little stranger.

She also resented the fact that William was so taken with his new daughter that he spent most of his time with her.

For his part, Albert felt a "*lukso ng dugo*" when he first saw his friend's adopted daughter. Soon, he was speculating that she was the baby he and his wife lost eight years ago.

Why was he so sure? The girls were approximately the same age—and William's adopted daughter had the same kind of birthmark on her upper arm that his baby had.

Thus far, the teleplay had been proceeding quite acceptably—but that birthmark twist jolted us because it felt like a throwback to the '50s and '60s, when such corny plot devices were the rage. To see the cheap device trotted out again in 2001 was much too much!

Anyway, it later turned out that the girl wasn't Albert's child, despite that coincidental birthmark. Still, she finally ended up with Albert and Liezl just the same because Yayo finally had her way, and besides, she got pregnant, so she and William were going to be non-adoptive parents in a few more months.

So, both couples ended up with kids to love and to make their families complete. Happy ending! Fine, but did the drama have to take such improbable twists and turns to keep viewers interested? It really didn't have to, because it was developing well enough without all those dated histrionics.

Other minus points includes excessive musical scoring and the little girl's being characterized as too wise for her age, and too talkative for everybody's good.

This was really too bad since the episode's basic drama was involving enough, and Liezl and Yayo's performances were simple, direct and deeply-felt. Unfortunately, the Martinez brothers tended to act up a storm, so they weren't able to match the honesty and focus of the two actresses' performances.

Rizal Day activities

DR. Jose Rizal's death anniversary will be observed at Rizal Park by way of these activities:

Dec. 27-29, a light and sound presentation, "The Martyrdom of Dr. Jose Rizal." There will be a guided tours of the Sound and Light Complex from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and two nightly presentations—at 6-6:30 p.m. and 7-7:30 p.m.—of the national hero's last moments.

At the Open-Air Auditorium, there will be a screening of the CCP's 1993 video production of Rizal's "Noli," directed by **Eddie Romero**, will **Joel Torre** as Crisostomo Ibarra and **Tetchie Agbayani** as Sisa.

The epic will be divided into three nightly screenings, with a Rizal scholar or film expert commenting on the evening's highlights.

Dec. 30 at 6 p.m., a stage presentation, "El Fili 2001," based on Rizal's second novel, directed by **Frannie Zamora** and starring **Allan Paule**, **Tintin Arnaldo** and **Karlo Enriquez** (also at the Open-Air Auditorium). Admission is free, courtesy of the 2001 Rizal Day National Committee.

Christmas gifts for the stars, 2

DOLLYWOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

THIS continues my list of symbolic Christmas tokens that I am giving to my friends in show biz, in lieu of getting them stuff they most likely have an excess of already or don't even need. You would be surprised to find out that even with their fat paychecks, stars know that the best things in life aren't always pricey things.

My mom, for instance, delights in hoarding cotton balls, cotton buds and mouthwash every time we go to a drugstore. And now on with my list.

Diether Ocampo: An automatic dryer for his tears when he's having the blues and he's locked up all alone in his room crying his heart out.

Paolo Bediones: A safety device so that his love affairs-to-be will have a chance to blossom instead of being nipped in the bud even before they could start.

Aga Muhlach: Conducting a seminar on how to master the art of holding on to your money. This young millionaire should be able to teach us a thing or two about spending wisely.

Charlene Gonzales-Muhlach: Special 2-in-1 appliances so that taking care of her twins would be a lot easier.

Pinky Amador: A huge net to catch the man of her dreams.

Jackie Castillejo: Chimes to beckon eligible guys who seem intimidated by her.

Christine Bersola: A trouble-free wedding planner to arrange all the details of her 2003 wedding date with **Julius Babao**.

Karen Davila: An extra-strong painkiller to soothe her when the anesthesia wears off in the delivery room.

Connie Sison: magnet to attract the good guys even more and a repellant to drive away the bad guys.

Boy Abunda: An immortality pill. A genuinely nice person like him ought to live forever.

Ryan Agoncillo: A lifetime guarantee that love the second time around is really best for him and his Filipino-Chinese girlfriend.

Janice de Belen: A lie detector so that she can screen the next guy who comes into her life.

And please allow me to say a special thank you to my friends who stand by me when I'm half-asleep, half-awake, half-crazy, half-sane: **Jie, Jane, Alex, Tati** and **Loy, Allana, Duke, Anton, Richie, Joey** and **Jam** (of Cinderella), **Noel** (of Baga Berde), **Bebot** (of Kilimanjaro) **Adjeng, Blue, Ced, Arnel** and **Maiza, Kat Tok, Tessa, Liz, Tita Bing, Tita Edna, Ricardo Chang** (of Page Boutique), **Volts, Kaye, Menji**, the two Montys, Rico F. Sweety and my Friends @ the Square family—**Albert, Boj** and **Ann, Grace, Alpha, Tina, Rita, Meg, Day, Nardy, Rey, Roman, Lou** and **Ronel**.

You are all my Christmas wishes come true.

For feedback, e-mail wateringhole2000@yahoo.com

Best male exotic dancer search

GRAM Productions' 2001 Best Male Exotic Dancer-Manila is now on its second year.

Sixteen gorgeous men vie for the much-coveted title and a chance to win $1,000 and a round-trip ticket to Singapore.

Runners-up will get P10,000 each and gift certificates from major sponsors.

The pageant will be held at 9 tonight at Southern Bulls Concert Hall in Timog Ave., Quezon City.

Gram Productions is composed of Dr. Lito Manzano, Gene Ciriaco, Cade Guerzon, Ricky Ramos, Mike Miranda and Terry Baylosis.

For tickets, call 373-8964.

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Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41 DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND-EX

1	2	3
HUBOG - R 18 11:00, 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, 9:50	DI KITA MA REACH - P 13 12:25, 2:45, 5:05, 7:25, 9:45	TATARIN - R 18 11:00, 1:10, 3:25, 5:40, 7:55, 10:10
4	5	6
YAMASHITA - GP 12:10, 2:30, 4:50, 7:10, 9:40	FOUR FATHERS - R 18 12:40, 2:55, 5:10, 7:25, 9:40	BAGONG BUWAN - P 13 11:20, 2:00, 4:40, 7:20, 10:00

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BUSINESS

RAÚL O. MARCELO, Editor ▨ CORRIE S. NARISMA, Assistant Editor

2002 seen as another transition year for RP

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

ROXAS

THE DEPARTMENT of Trade and Industry expects 2002 to be another transition year for the Philippine economy as the continuing weakness in the country's biggest export markets—US and Japan—curtail growth opportunities.

Economic managers had likewise predicted 2001 to be a transition period for the Macapagal administration shortly after taking over the Estrada administration in January.

Trade Secretary Manuel Roxas II said 2002 would be tough but not an insurmountable year for the economy. "We will be in a defensive posture next year," Roxas said.

"Anybody can say anything about our numbers but they should put everything into perspective. We were expected to go down last year but the fact that we managed to post positive growth when other countries like Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the United States and Japan were down is already an accomplishment for us," Roxas said.

Roxas said that the projected economic growth of 3.1 percent next year should not be compared with the 4-percent to 8-percent growth rates that were attained when expectations were very high.

"That's not the situation today. Our situation now is that the world is on a downtrend," Roxas said.

The DTI will again bank on the domestic economy to keep the domestic economy humming. He said the government would work on encouraging Filipinos to buy Filipino-made goods.

As the economy goes into another transition period, Roxas said the DTI would focus on building its strengths in preparation for the "end of the tunnel" in 2003.

The agency has identified 10 priority areas that would be the catalyst for export growth—motor vehicle parts; micro-electronics; construction materials; giftware and holiday decors; information technology products and services; food products; marine products; home furnishings; and organic and natural products.

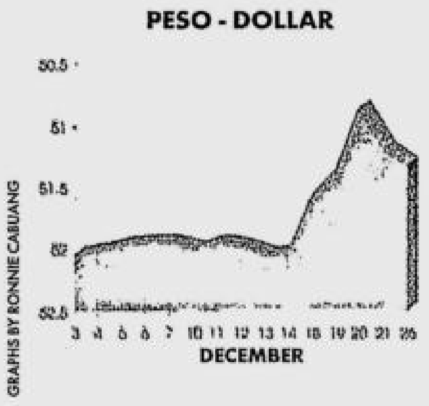
Earlier, the Board of Investments said it would give priority to investment projects that have potential to create more jobs.

Roxas earlier said that while the government was not giving up on investments in manufacturing, it would actively look out for more opportunities in the "green field" of services and agriculture.

"Our policy initiative is to promote and develop a skills-intensive service sector. This means that the investments we will be looking for are those that require small capital expenditure but with big potential to create more jobs," Roxas said.

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



Peso-Dollar Rate

P 51.32 = $1

As of 5 p.m.,
Dec. 26, 2001

¥ 130.72 = $1

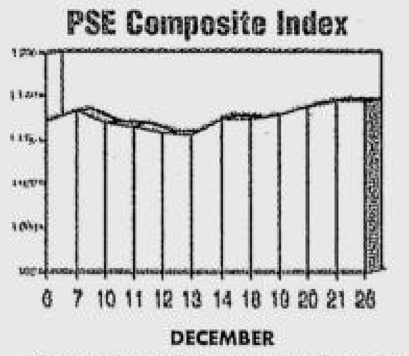
As of 5 p.m.,
Dec. 26, 2001

GOLD:$277.20/277.70

per ounce Hong Kong,
Dec. 21, 2001

STOCK MARKET

Stocks down



(See stock market report on Page B2)

SHARE prices closed almost unchanged yesterday as fund managers squared off their accounts just before the year ends, analysts said.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index dropped by 0.48 points to 1,145.49.

There was no trading on Monday and Tuesday due to Christmas.

"Trading has been very light because of fund managers squaring off their accounts before the yearend," said Jose Vistan of AB Capital Securities Inc.

Turnover fell to 249.8 million shares worth P240.9 million from 262.49 million shares worth P531.34 million.

Equitable Banking Corp. rose P1.50 to P26.50 but the Bank of the Philippine Islands dropped 50 centavos to P57.50 while Benpres Corp. dropped 5 centavos to 59 centavos.

AFP

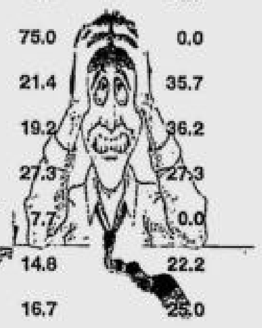
INQUIRER MONITOR

Figures that matter in our nation's life

Business outlook by industry

(1st quarter 2002, in percent)

INDUSTRY GROUP	IMPROVING	DETERIORATING	NO CHANGE
Agriculture, fishery & forestry	50.0	25.0	0.0
Mining & quarrying	0.0	0.0	100.0
Manufacturing	9.8	31.7	48.8
Electricity, gas & water	75.0	0.0	25.0
Construction	21.4	35.7	28.6
Wholesale & retail trade	19.2	36.2	36.2
Hotel	27.3	27.3	45.4
Transportation, storage & comm.	7.7	0.0	46.2
Financial intermediation	14.8	22.2	40.8
Business activity	16.7	25.0	50.0
Real estate	0.0	20.0	20.0
Community & social services	40.0	40.0	20.0



Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' Business Expectations Survey, 4th Qtr. 2001

A BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas survey showed a negative business outlook for the first quarter of 2002. It indicated a 9.8 percent diffusion index which, however, was an improvement from the 32.6 percent diffusion index for the last quarter of 2001. Diffusion index is the difference between firms that have an "improving" outlook and firms with "deteriorating" outlook.

Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research

BSP keeps policy rates unchanged

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE MONETARY Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas yesterday decided to keep its key overnight rates unchanged even if pressures on the foreign exchange rate have been easing.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura yesterday said the overnight borrowing and lending rates were left at their existing levels of 7.75 and 10 percent, respectively.

The BSP has slashed its overnight rates by a total of 725 basis points since December last year. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the US, however, the BSP has not been able to match the more aggressive interest rates cuts effected by the US Federal Reserves.

Analysts said that the easing of the inflation rate and the exchange rate—the two major factors that affect the BSP's monetary policies—should give the institution more leeway to infuse fresh liquidity into the system and perk up the domestic economy through further cuts in its policy rates and in the reserve requirements imposed on banks.

Buenaventura said last week that the central monetary institution would monitor the financial markets before deciding on further changes in its policy rates.

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BMW 318ia	2,015,000	403,000	38,933
BMW 318ia Exec	2,165,000	433,000	44,514
BMW 325ia	2,600,000	520,000	53,465
BMW 325ia Exec	2,700,000	540,500	56,856

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PGA Cars, Inc. 201 EDSA Mandaluyong City• Tel No. 724-09-64/ 727-03-86•727-03-81 to 85 727-03-88 to 89•Fax 727-03-90 **Wheels, Inc.** 222 E. Rodriguez Sr. Ave. Quezon City• Tel Nos. 721-84-77•721-84-39•411-35-80•Fax 727-83-37

Per DTI-NCR Permit no. 4734 Series of 2001

Guilty of plan there

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Banal III

HOW this cute administration can keep its promise to control the budget deficit remains a top secret of Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho.

The "plan," which the Whiz himself hatched earlier, in all likelihood, can no longer be done within the year. I hear the Pagcor board already dissed it. Officially!

Under the plan, the state gaming monopoly—the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp.—buys land from the state reclamation monopoly—the Public Estates Authority.

Pagcor pays for it simply by getting money from the state investment monopoly—National Development Co.—which then issues billions of pesos worth of bonds.

The PEA then turns around. It remits the money to the National Treasury and the budget deficit shrinks. No fast hands here! It is really better than magic.

The only question is: Who eventually pays for the bonds? The NDC merely uses its name. The actual borrower is Pagcor. Thus, Pagcor still pays for the bonds in the end.

The board thinks the "plan" can spoil Pagcor's cash flow. It may be in the gambling business, but Pagcor does not like to gamble with its own money. Shrewd, huh!

* * *

UNFORTUNATELY for the Whiz, solving the deficit problem was meant to be the gift of this cute administration to the Filipino people.

As soon as it assumed power last January, this cute administration proclaimed proudly that it would stay within the limit that it set on itself for the deficit.

That was even before this cute administration found the previous administration guilty of economic plunder since it incurred huge deficits for two straight years.

Recently, with still a couple of months to go in 2001, the Department of Finance already bragged that it figured out a way to reduce the deficit.

In her yearend economic briefing, no wonder, Gloriaetta hailed it, unabashedly, as her administration's single-biggest economic triumph for the year.

I don't know if Gloriaetta knows it, but up to this very minute, the business community still cannot contain its laughter over the claim.

Everybody knows it's just a cover-up. The finance department only hides the deficit by applying a lot of financial cosmetics. It's no magic, sure, but it still makes use of fast hands.

* * *

USING its fast hands, the finance department just transfers money from one pocket to another. It's just that, instead of the government, Pagcor becomes the borrower. Well and good!

All right, Pagcor thinks it has a great plan for the reclaimed property of the PEA by the Manila Bay. It wants to set up an "entertainment city." Move over, Pegassus!

To some people, the idea may sound too ambitious, but why not? It's sort of like a mini Las Vegas. People also asked then, "Who would want to gamble in the desert?"

Still, times are not exactly that great here. Sure, we need another grand-scale property venture right this minute. Everybody in real estate is only bleeding.

What if, just what if, the Pagcor project bombs? Paying the NDC for the bonds will surely burden Pagcor, unless it starts cheating at the baccarat tables or something.

Like in any business, borrowing a huge sum of money is really a big gamble, the gambling business not excluded. What happens if Pagcor loses on its bet?

Well, the government doesn't get any share in the Pagcor income. Worse, the Office of the President doesn't get anything for its "social fund." Whatever that is!

* * *

MAYBE the finance department doesn't care much for the income of Pagcor years from now, but I'm sure Gloriaetta does care. For all we know, she may still be the President by then.

Look, Kuya Eddie has already been forced to deny that he intends to run in 2004. Unless, of course, by "run" you actually mean "jogging."

The Kuya is the founder of the ruling Lakas party, which adopted Gloriaetta a few years ago. Talk is she is now isolated in her foster party. She may set up her own.

Whether or not she remains with Lakas for 2004, however, Gloriaetta still needs the "social fund." It goes to projects for the vote-rich masses. It gives her the upper hand.

Pagcor gives a lot to the President's so-called social fund. Why do you think, despite her election promise about morality, Tita Cory did not close down the casinos?

That's why the Pagcor board is not really that excited about the magical solution of the Whiz. There in the board they found him guilty of giving Pagcor a dangerous plan.

That's why up to now, we don't know the solution to the budget deficit puzzle. The sad thing is, Gloriaetta really believes she got it licked!

* * *

FROM the start, anyway, Pagcor chair Ephrem Genuino wants the "entertainment city" to be a no-cash-out project. Precisely because of that "social fund," what else?

Genuino is an orig. This, in the official family of Gloriaetta, is rare. She did not have that big a group of trusted men, when she came into power.

In January this year, remember, even before Gloriaetta could appoint a single member of her new Cabinet, she already put Genuino to Pagcor. That kind of trusted!

As expected, Genuino, of course, wants to protect the interest of his boss. He therefore does not want to gamble with the future income of Pagcor.

Under his original plan, Pagcor should get investors in the project. His criterion is simple. They take care of the funding. Pagcor takes care of the attraction—the casino.

I guess Pagcor has to remain shrewd in its dealings. To me, it's the best of all the money-raising companies of the government. Not even SSS or GSIS can match it.

Look, both the SSS and GSIS must give back the money to their members some ways. They are in the business of social insurance.

As for Pagcor, it does have to give back a single centavo to its . . . well, "members." The only insurance I know in Pagcor is the one you buy in blackjack.

Once you give your money to Pagcor, the only way to get it back is to risk giving Pagcor some more. You know—by betting again. It's a veritable money machine.

Benpres takes ownership of 12.5% stake in Digitel

BY DORIS C. DUMLAO

BENPRES Holdings Corp. is taking a 12.5-percent stake in Digital Telecommunications Philippines Inc. as payment for debts that Digitel owes Benpres.

In a disclosure, Benpres corporate secretary Enrique Quiason yesterday informed the Philippine Stock Exchange that Benpres would take possession of 795.05 million Digitel shares by exercising its right on shares pledged as collateral for several money market placements made by Benpres earlier this year.

"Benpres was constrained to acquire the shares as settlement for the money market placements," Quiason told the local bourse.

"Immediately thereafter, Benpres will commence a search for interested buyers for said shares," he added.

Benpres did not identify in its disclosure the investor that owed it money.

Market analysts suggested, however, that based on the latest record of Digitel's shareholder structure, the same amount of shares was registered to the trust and investment departments of either the old Asian Banking Corp. or AB Capital Corp.

This means Asianbank is holding the shares in trust for another investor—a minority stockholder of Digitel and not the cash-laden Gokongwei group, the analysts said.

An analyst, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that in early 1999, there were rumors that businessman Mark Jimenez, now a lawmaker, was accumulating Digitel shares. He suggested that Jimenez, a close adviser of deposed President Joseph Estrada who had offered to testify against his former benefactor, was now unloading his shares in Digitel.

Digitel is the country's second largest landline service provider. It is 47.4-percent owned by the Gokongwei family's flagship company, JG Summit Holdings Inc. Another minority shareholder is Swedish company Telia AB, which holds a 9.4-percent stake.

Benpres is currently undergoing a corporate restructuring to ease its debt burden. It earlier decided to liquidate over $235 million worth of assets.

Benpres has $150 million worth of Eurobonds maturing in December next year. Of the peso-denominated component of its obligations, P1 billion fell due in September this year. Another P2 billion was set to mature in October 2003.

Among the assets that Benpres is willing to sell are up to 8 percent of its stake in flagship company ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp., 33 percent in a joint venture between its cable subsidiary, Sky Vision Corp., and Home Cable, and up to 25 percent of its holdings in power generation unit First Generation Holdings Corp.

In the case of First Generation, two new investors—Japanese trading giant Sumitomo Corp. and AIDEC FG Power Corp. Ltd.—have bought into the company.

PLDT sinks $5.5M in call center

BY ABIGAIL L. HO

THE PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. has invested over $5.5 million in another call center venture, Parlance Systems Inc., set to be operational by March 15 next year.

The new 500-seat customer interaction center is a joint venture with satellite television service provider EchoStar Communications Corp.

PLDT multi-channel contact center senior vice president Rosalie Montenegro said "PLDT will not lose" with the three-year contract with EchoStar as it had a "guaranteed income" provision.

Under the contract, EchoStar will pay the dominant carrier a certain amount whether or not the call center earns or gets a specific number of minutes per month.

She said EchoStar initially guaranteed the call center 2 million minutes per month, but "this could quickly go up to 5 million minutes depending on the performance."

Projected call volume for Parlance was placed at 2 million minutes by the end of its second or third month in operation.

Montenegro added that they expected a return on their investment in around two to three years.

PLDT earlier inked two call center contracts with Jardine Salmat Corp. for Contact World and TeleTech Holdings Inc. for Vocative.

The Contact World contract was signed on June 28 last year, with both PLDT and Jardine Salmat agreeing to put in a $1-million initial investment that could go up to $10 million as the need arises.

Contact World is 51-percent owned by PLDT's multi-media subsidiary, ePLDT. It went live early this year.

Vocative, on the other hand, was the result of PLDT's alliance with the second largest call center service provider in the United States, TeleTech.

The contract was signed in Aug. 28 for a 500-workstation call center, which would start operations in end-January.

Montenegro said the contract with TeleTech was a 10-year contract renewable every three years.

She added that their two latest deals, those for Vocative and Parlance, were "very lucrative because we're going after volume."

"We won't go for just 50 to 100 seats. We're going for economies of scale so we just invest in call centers with 500 seats or more," she said.

Montenegro said that they would also be concentrating on tapping the international call center market in the coming months. She reasoned that the Philippines still had an edge over its closest competitor, India, in terms of warmth and trainability.

By the first or second quarter of next year, she said they were looking at another call center venture, this time out of the United Kingdom.

She added that they were targeting 2,000 call center seats by the end of next year.

Pepsi seeks to expand market share

BY DORIS C. DUMLAO

PEPSI Cola Products Philippines Inc. is seeking to recapture at least a 20-percent share in the local soft drink market despite the mammoth competition arising from the consolidation of industry leaders Coca-Cola Bottlers Philippines Inc. and Cosmos Bottling Corp.

Yuen Po Seng, EVP of Prime Orion Philippines Inc. (formerly Guoco Holdings (Phils.) Inc.), said US-based PepsiCo Inc. would help its local unit brace for the cut-throat competition.

"They will continue in their efforts to put it back on track," Seng said.

PepsiCo had lost to arch-rival Coca-Cola Co. of Atlanta and the San Miguel Corp. group in a bidding war for the acquisition of CBC.

Seng said PCPPI, whose existing market share he estimated at 17 percent, would attempt to improve its performance. He said that with a giant competitor gobbling up the lion's share of the market, the focus would be to increase sales volumes, improve advertising and promotion and bring down operating costs.

A strict belt-tightening program has been implemented with the company's capital and operating expenditures slashed by more than 50 percent. This program enabled the company to generate over P200 million in savings in fiscal year 1999-2000 and another P50 million in fiscal year 2000-2001.

He said PCPPI would not need a new strategic partner as the two major shareholders of the soft drink company—the Guoco group and PepsiCo—could work on the strengthening of its operations on their own.

Prime Orion's latest report said PCPPI posted notable improvements in operating results in its last fiscal year ending June as it pursued various marketing programs and intensified cash conservation, cost control and productivity improvement measures.

For instance, it said that the company implemented trade development schemes to improve product availability. It has put in place productivity improvement programs to sustain the fruits of its entrepreneurial distribution system involving third party selling and distribution system.

"Although these moves were insufficient to completely arrest the decline in sales volume, it enabled the company to limit the drop to only 7 percent," the report said.

Also, the report noted that the decline in PCPPI's volumes amid the weak consumer demand in the country was negated by a series of price increases between November 2000 and January 2001.

"The price adjustments enabled PCPPI to post a 3-percent increase in net sales in a market that remained largely flat during the period and in an industry that has become increasingly competitive," the report said.

On productivity improvement, the development of a more focused organization was prioritized during the past fiscal year.

"While the company continued to be affected by high financing costs and overhead, the above-mentioned initiatives have further stabilized operations, enabling PCPPI to reduce its operating loss by 54 percent and sustain its positive cash flow position and EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization)," it said.

Infocom income to hit ₱339.2M

BY ABIGAIL L. HO

INFOCOM, the Internet firm of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.'s multi-media subsidiary ePLDT, is projecting P339.2 million in revenues for 2001, up 31 percent from last year's figures.

It closed last year with P258.1 million in revenues coming from both the corporate and consumer aspects of its business.

As of mid-December this year, the company has already posted P306.9 million in revenues, only P32.3 million shy of its target.

Revenue growth for 2001 would be slower, though, as compared with last year's numbers. From 1999 to 2000, Infocom posted a 33-percent growth in revenues, while it only expected to grow by 31 percent this year.

Infocom chief operating officer Cecilio Lorenzo said "anything could have affected" the growth slowdown. He added that the Internet business was not the only one going through downtimes, but all other businesses in the world as well.

Despite the global economic downturn, Lorenzo said Infocom expected its subscriber base to continue growing until the end of the year as well as in the coming months.

DISCLOSURES

URBANCORP Realty Developers Inc. said it had no information that could explain the decline in its share price from 32 centavos to 19.5 centavos.

* * *

CITYLAND Development Corp. disclosed it would use proceeds of its initial public offering to finance the construction of its new project in Makati. Development cost was estimated at about P470 million.

* * *

CENTRO Escolar University has bought 51,000 of its shares at P9 each.

* * *

MRC Allied Industries Inc. adjourned its annual stockholders' meeting due to a lack of quorum. *Compiled by Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research*

Philippine Stock Exchange

(As of Wednesday, December 26, 2001)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Bank of the Phil. Islands	68	68.5	67	67.5	346,800
China Banking Corp.	580	580	580	580	11,610
Chinatrust Comm. Bank	12	12	12	12	2,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	25	27	25	26.5	1,902,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	189	190	187	190	74,750
Philippine National Bank	67	70	67	67	38,800
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	17	17	17	17	5,000
Security Bank Corp.	17	17	16	17	1,900
Union Bank of the Phil.	16.25	16.75	16.25	16.5	179,900
FINANCIAL SERVICE					
Bankard Inc.	1.1	1.14	1.1	1.14	80,000
Filipino Fund Inc.	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	50,000
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	70,000
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	40,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	605	605	605	605	1,680
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.026	0.026	0.026	0.026	400,000
Liberty Telecoms Holdings	0.28	0.35	0.2	0.3	210,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	33,000
Phil. Telegraph & Tel. Co.	0.15	0.2	0.15	0.2	1,030,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	420	420	417.5	417.5	4,900
Philweb.Com Inc.	0.018	0.018	0.018	0.018	9,000,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	22	23	22	23	3,600
Manila Electric Co. B	31.5	31.5	31	31	205,500
Petron Corp.	1.52	1.52	1.48	1.48	2,980,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	0.86	0.87	0.86	0.87	40,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.14	1.14	1.14	1.14	200,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	2.08	2.22	2.08	2.18	2,987,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Fortune Cement Corp.	0.16	.16	.16	.16	10,000
Union Cement Corp.	0.84	.84	.82	.82	30,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	2	2	2	2	9,000
Cosmos Bottling Corp.	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.7	158,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	11.75	11.75	11.75	11.75	1,700
La Tondena Distillers Inc.	23.25	23.25	23.25	23.25	39,800
RFM Corp.	2.36	2.4	2.34	2.36	1,877,000
Swift Food Inc.	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	10,000
San Miguel Corp. A	42.5	42.5	42.5	42.5	262,300
San Miguel Corp. B	52.5	53	52.5	52.5	877,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Atok-Big Wedge Co. Inc.	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2	5,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	50,000
Ayala Corp.	4.75	4.75	4.65	4.65	582,000
Alliance Global Group Inc.	11.25	11.5	11.25	11.5	1,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.77	0.8	0.77	0.8	420,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.0065	0.0065	0.0065	0.0065	7,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	15,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.63	0.63	0.59	0.59	17,490,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.175	0.18	0.175	0.175	1,230,000
Ebecom Holdings Inc.	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.085	100,000
Fil-Hispano Holdings Corp.	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	6,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp	26.5	26.5	26.5	26.5	93,800
Ionics Inc.	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.8	21,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	1.56	1.62	1.56	1.62	66,000
Megaworld Corp.	0.7	0.71	0.7	0.7	2,080,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.32	0.33	0.32	0.32	1,070,000
Music Corp.	0.35	0.37	0.34	0.34	3,630,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35	100,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	50,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	30,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Federal Chemicals Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	45,000
Interphil Labs Inc. A	0.65	0.65	0.65	0.65	10,000
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	10,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	13.5	13.75	13.5	13.75	222,100
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICE					
Belle Corp.	0.55	0.58	0.54	0.56	9,450,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	9,000,000
Manila Jockey Club	9.5	9.5	9.5	9.5	15,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp (Pdr)	23.5	23.5	23.5	23.5	55,000
DMCI Holdings Inc- Pref.	565	570	565	570	200
Equitable Pci Bank-War	1.98	2	1.94	1.96	423,000
Globe Telecom Hldg (Pdr)	590	590	590	590	550
Jollibee Warrants	11.25	11.25	11.25	11.25	21,700
Omico Corp. Warrant	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	45,000,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series T	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
PLDT (10% Pref.) Series U	10	10.25	10	10.25	2,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Z	10	10	10	10	3,000
PLDT 10% Pref Series Aa	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
Philweb.Com Inc. -Warrants	0.005	0.005	0.0048	0.005	34,000,000
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	9.1	9.2	9.1	9.2	24,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	4.65	4.75	4.65	4.7	2,364,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	30,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.205	0.21	0.205	0.21	750,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.32	860,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	1,200,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.82	1.82	1.74	1.74	5,836,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	90,000
Primetown Property Group	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	10,000
SM Development Corp.	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	100,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.3	6.3	6.2	6.2	56,000
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.39	20,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc B	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.68	20,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	3.1	3.1	3	3	232,000
Omico Corp.	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	20,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	100,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	1,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	16,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	44,000,000
Pacifica	0.014	0.014	0.014	0.014	1,000,000
Vulcan Ind'l	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	50,000

	SHARES	VALUE (P)
Banks & Fin Svc	2,763,260	96,976,395.00
Comm'l & Ind'l	152,735,730	120,045,690.00
PRO	11,296,000	22,531,860.00
Mining	20,372,000	828,600.00
OIL	62,050,000	399,500.00
GRAND TOTALS :	249,216,990	240,782,045.00

AVERAGES		
Banks & Fin Svc	497.25	UP 4.33
Comm'l & Ind'l	1,551.01	DOWN 4.28
PRO	491.98	UP 0.28
Mining	1,027.21	UNCH 0.00
OIL	1.97	UNCH 0.00
All Shares Index	688.64	DOWN 0.59
Composite	1,145.49	DOWN 0.48

NO. OF ADVANCES: 34; NO. OF DECLINES: 25; NO. OF UNCHANGED: 38;
NO. OF TRADED ISSUES: 97; NO. OF TRADES: 1,717

CURRENCIES

Dec. 26, 2001

Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Foreign currency In US$	Foreign currency In Peso
United States	Dollar	1.140251	1.000000	51.1530
Japan	Yen	0.008716	0.007644	0.3910
United Kingdom	Pound	1.647548	1.444900	73.9110
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.146374	0.128370	6.5665
Switzerland	Franc	0.674665	0.591681	30.2663
Canada	Dollar	0.715205	0.627235	32.0850
Singapore	Dollar	0.619029	0.542888	27.7703
Australia	Dollar	0.580281	0.508906	26.0321
Bahrain	Dinar	3.024699	2.652661	135.6916
Kuwait	Dinar	N/A	N/A	N/A
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.304067	0.266667	13.6408
Brunei	Dollar	0.619265	0.543095	27.7809
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000112	0.000098	0.0050
Thailand	Baht	0.025944	0.022753	1.1639
UAE	Dirham	0.310526	0.272331	13.9305
Korea	Won	0.000878	0.000770	0.0394
Euro	Euro	1.000000	0.877000	44.8612
Germany	Mark	0.511292	0.448403	22.9372
France	Franc	0.152450	0.133698	6.8391
Netherlands	Guilder	0.453780	0.397965	20.3571
Austria	Schilling	0.072673	0.063734	3.2602
Belgium	Franc	0.024789	0.021740	1.1121
Italy	Lire	0.000517	0.000453	0.0232
Finland	Markka	0.168188	0.147501	7.5451
Portugal	Escudo	0.004987	0.004374	0.2237
Spain	Peseta	0.006010	0.005271	0.2696
Luxemburg	Franc	0.024789	0.02174	1.1121
Ireland	Punt	1.269738	1.11356	56.9619

Retailers set to cut prices even more

NEW YORK—Consumers who have benefited from bargain basement prices in the past week have seen nothing yet.

Retailers who discounted more than for any holiday season in recent memory are now set to slash prices even more than usual in the traditional post-Christmas sales—threatening to erode further already thin profit margins.

And the selection of merchandise on special offer is also set to be much wider than in past years.

Businesswear retailer Brooks Brothers, recently bought by Italy's Luxottica Group SpA, and luxury department store company Neiman Marcus Group Inc. have already begun to advertise post-Christmas sales in newspapers.

And May Department Stores Co.'s Lord & Taylor mailed coupons offering its customers an extra 20-percent-off sale and clearance items from Dec. 26 to Dec. 28.

Shoppers have already been stunned by discounts this year, boasting about the deals at such stores as Gap Inc.'s, Old Navy, where some bought T-shirts for $1.99 and heavy jackets for $6.99.

Some prices of handbags at Federated Department Stores Inc., Macy's flagship store at New York's Herald Square, were slashed by half, and leather planners were sold for $12, a third of their regular price.

Some shoppers said they were ready for what they expected would be even better prices after Christmas.

Shopping at Macy's at Herald Square, clerical worker Theresa Spivey bought a snow globe and a plate for $20, with each cost lower than she had seen advertised.

"I've been reading that sales are slow, so I think there are going to be great sales after Christmas," said Spivey.

Some said they were holding out until after Christmas for better bargains on goods they were buying for themselves.

"Sales are already very good, but I definitely plan on shopping after Christmas." said Mike Long, on vacation from Ireland.

"The deals will probably be about 50-percent off," Long said. "I'm looking for a leather jacket."

Cuts eat into profit

But what's good news to consumers is bad news for retailers, as the need to cut prices will likely eat into their already dwindling profits or lead to widening losses.

"Post-Christmas discounts will clearly be aggressive this season," said Jeff Klinefelter, an analyst at US Bancorp Piper Jaffray.

Klinefelter said that with retailers desperate to unload seasonal goods such as coats and sweaters even at a loss, the post-Christmas season always offers huge discounts in the range of 50 percent to 75 percent.

He said he expected discounts to be at the higher end of that range this season.

But the big difference this year, he said, was that with retail sales flat, stores were stuck with more excess inventory than usual, meaning that consumers were likely to find a better selection of products in stock.

"There will be deeper product availability this year," Klinefelter said, adding that retailers cut inventory earlier in the year in anticipation of sluggish sales, but that sales ended up being lower still.

In addition, some retailers were already advertising their post-Christmas sales over the weekend, when Christmas shopping was still going on. *Reuters*

Japan auto production mixed

TOKYO—Domestic auto production and sales figures at Japan's leading automakers were mixed in November as tough international competition and a global economic slowdown undermined the industry, companies reported Wednesday.

Toyota Motor Corp. said production dropped 9.3 percent to 282,491 vehicles in November from the same time last year, marking its second straight month of decline.

Domestic sales at Japan's largest carmaker slumped 18.1 percent to 131,143, its third straight month of decline. Toyota president Fujio Cho said last week Toyota's sales were pressured by new car launches at rival carmakers.

The Fit subcompact released in June by Honda Motor Co. has eaten into the domestic market share of other carmakers, ousting Toyota's Corolla from the top Japanese sales spot in November.

Nissan Motor Co. said domestic output rose 7.8 percent to 114,129 cars in November, up for the second month mainly on demand for the recently remodeled Stagea and Wingroad station wagons and the Liberty minivan.

But Nissan's domestic sales fell 1.4 percent to 56,748 vehicles. *AP*

Hynix likely to sign MoU with Micron

SEOUL—South Korea's troubled Hynix Semiconductor Inc. is likely to sign a deal with Micron Technology Inc. in January, featuring equity swaps and asset sales, Hynix and government officials said Wednesday.

The prospect of two of the world's leading semiconductor makers joining hands sent Hynix shares 14.85 percent higher to their daily limit of 2,345 won before they were suspended from further trade for the day.

"A delegation from Micron Technology will visit Seoul in January and sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Hynix," said Lee Keun-Young, head of the Financial Supervisory Commission.

"The MoU will contain key points of the strategic alliance," he said.

Upon arrival from negotiations with Micron in the United States, Hynix president and chief executive officer Park Chong-Sup on Tuesday said an MoU would be signed as soon as in early January.

"The two sides agreed to a very creative deal of strategic alliance which includes asset sales and equity swaps," he said.

He strongly hinted Hynix will sell its semiconductor unit in the United State's state of Oregon to Micron and that the two companies will jointly manage other Hynix facilities through equity swaps.

Hynix suspended the plant in Oregon for six months until mid-January to shift into the production of 256 megabit dynamic random access memory (DRAM) chips instead of the current 64 megabit DRAM.

The plant used to produce 16 percent of Hynix's total DRAM wafer output and more than half of the company's 64-megabit-DRAM chips.

Further talks are required to fix the price of Hynix facilities to be sold to Micron and decide on the ratio at which Hynix shares should be swapped for those of Micron, he said.

Hynix, the world's third largest memory chipmaker following Samsung Electronics and Micron, launched a second round of talks on a strategic alliance with Micron this month. *AFP*

A company with a Philippine investment portfolio is seeking to dispose of certain relatively illiquid holdings. These are as follows:-

No. of Shares	Company
300,000	AGP Industrial Corporation
714,800	Atlas Consolidated Mining and Development Corporation (US register)
10,500,000	PetroEnergy Resources Corporation
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Rockwell Center - Makati	Rockwell Drive cor. R. Palma St., Rockwell Center, Poblacion, Makati City
Tomas Morato - Kamuning	Corner Kamuning & Tomas Morato Avenue, Quezon City
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Rizal St. - San Pablo	Rizal Avenue cor. P. Alcantara St., San Pablo City, Laguna
Kamias Road	San Sebastian Bldg., No. 90 Kamias Road cor. K-J St., Quezon City
Digos - Gen. Luna	Rizal Avenue, Zone II, Digos, Davao del Sur
Blue Ridge - Katipunan	Upper Ground Floor Level, Marmico Bldg., 223 Katipunan Road, Brgy. Milagrosa, Quezon City
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Times Plaza - U.N. Avenue	Unit G - 2B, Times Plaza Bldg., Taft cor. United Nations Avenue, Ermita, Manila
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Candidates must have a College degree; with at least 6 years experience in Ground Support Equipment preventive maintenance, inspection and repair; and must have a valid Driver's License.

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Candidates must have a College degree; with at least 6 years experience in aircraft ramp handling and a valid Driver's License.

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Candidates must be graduates of a Technical/Vocational course; with at least 5 years experience in Ground Support Equipment preventive maintenance, inspection and repair, and must have a Driver's License.

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Candidates must be High School graduates preferably with at least two years of Vocational education; with at least 2 years experience in general equipment maintenance, inspection and repair; and must have a valid Driver's License.

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Candidates must be High School graduates preferably with at least two years of Vocational education; with at least 2 years experience in aircraft ramp handling; and must have a valid Driver's License.

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LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE is given that the estate of the late **Candido G. Salvador** has been extrajudicially settled among his heirs as per Doc.#133. Page#27, Book#XVI Series of 2001 Not. Pub. Renato C Sta Teresa of Mktl. City (PDI-December 13, 20 & 27 2001)

Notice is hereby given that the estate of the late BEATRIZ I. HAUTEA located at Brgy Kapitolyo, Pasig City has been extrajudicially settled by her heirs as per Doc. 394, Page. 79, Book 1, Series of 2001 by Notary Public Conrado E. Panlaque Jr. for Quezon City. (PDI-Dec-13, 20 & 27, 2001)

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Our Dearly Beloved

CESAR VELASCO AGUILAR JR.

June 8, 1969 - December 21, 2001

of Libon, Albay & Lagro, Quezon City

Peacefully joined Our Lord on December 21, 2001
at the age of 32.

His loving wife **Nadia**; son **Cesar Gabriel**; father **Cesar Sr.** (†); mother **Bachay**; sisters **Germie** and **Nanni**; brother **Ching-Ching**; brother-in-law **Yusuf**; other relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the Nacional Memorial Homes, Chapel 2-B, 264 G. Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Friday, December 28, 2001 at the Holy Cross Memorial Park, Novaliches, Quezon City after the 8:00 a.m. Mass at Chapel 2-B.

"I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given Me, for they are yours."

John 17:9

"You will forever be in our hearts."

JOSE E. ELIZAGA

Passed away in the Grace of our Lord on December 24, 2001 at the age of 74.

His loving wife **Concepcion Inocencio Elizaga**; children **Eva & Joseph Tavara, Joel & Jocelyn Elizaga**; brothers **Ben & Roberto**; sister **Alice**; grandchildren **Taipan, Tilette, Corinne & Ian**; relatives and friends wish his eternal rest.

His body lies in state at La Funeraria Paz, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Saturday, December 29, 2001 at La Loma Cemetery after the 9:00 a.m. Mass.

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28

"Papa, You shall forever live in our minds and in our hearts."

DR. ALBERTO MEJIA REYES, SR.

of San Nicolas, Pangasinan and Quezon City

RETIRED CHIEF, National Bureau of Investigation
(Medico Legal Division)

Peacefully joined our Lord and Creator on December 24, 2001
at the age of 67.

He is survived by his loving wife **Dr. Josie Fojas-Reyes**; children **Mario Perpetuo "Marc"**, **Joseph** and **Alberto, Jr. "Abet"**; brothers, sisters and in-laws.

His remains lie in state at the St. Martin Chapel, Sto. Domingo Church, Quezon Avenue, Quezon City. Daily Mass shall be offered at 7:00 PM.

His remains shall be cremated at the Eternal Garden Crematory, Leland Drive, Baesa, Caloocan City after the 10:00 a.m. Mass on December 29, 2001 at the Sto. Domingo Church.

Our Dearly Beloved Tatay

IRINEO "NANING" Q. KALINGO

peacefully joined his Creator on
25 December 2001 at the age of 76.

His wife Evelina; loving children, in-laws, grandchildren, relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the family residence at #30 G. Coching St., Buting, Pasig City.

Funeral Mass will be on Saturday, December 29, 2001 at Pateros Catholic Church at 1:00 p.m.

Interment will immediately follow.

ANICETO M. CABOBOY

of Basey, Samar

Passed away on December 25, 2001
at the age of 67.

His body lies in state at the La Funeraria Paz, Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Saturday, December 29, 2001 at the Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina after the 8:00 a.m. Mass at La Funeraria Paz.

"He loved his God. He loved his family and friends unconditionally. He served others above himself. Now, the Father has called him to his eternal reward."

MESAEL BINUYA CABALLERO

Passed away in the Grace of our Lord on December 23, 2001.

His wife **Adela Iball**; children **Krisel, Kevon, Keren, Israel, Ismael, Ibrahem**; brothers **Joselito, Raul, Isagani, Conie**; sisters **Aracell, Elizabeth, Corazon, Vangie**; brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, other relatives and friends request the reader to pray for the repose of his soul.

His remains lie in the family home at Purok 2, Nabunturan, Compostela Valley.

Interment will be on December 28, 2001 at the Golden Valley Memorial Park in Nabunturan following the 9:00 a.m. Mass at the Sta. Teresita of the Child Jesus Parish Church.

MESSAGE OF THANKS

We, the family

Loving children and in-laws **Amadeo Jr.** (†) and **Norma**, **Ricardo** (†) and **Gloria**, **Ching** and **Jun** (†) **Austria**; **Baby** and **Bern Jalandoni**, **Guillermo** (†), **Kit** and **Nene Lichauco**, **Ben** and **Linda**, **Tony** and **Gloria**, **Johnny**; nephews, nieces, grandchildren and great grandchildren

of the late

CONSTANCIA "TANCHING" CAJUCOM QUINTOS

who joined her Creator on November 18, 2001.

Sincerely convey our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all those who offered Masses and prayers, sent flowers, visited and kept vigil, attended the funeral rites and condoled with us in our moment of grief.

Engr. JOSE ROSALINO L. SELUDO

RETIRED PROJECT MANAGER MWSS

peacefully joined his Creator on December 26, 2001
at the age of 72.

His bereaved wife **Elvira**; children **Racquel, Ramon** and **Raul**; grandchildren **Madette, Timothy, Aaron, Raymond, Josiah, Christine** and **Elisha**; sisters **Dr. Soledad Fernandez** and **Flory**; relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at Ascension of Our Lord Parish, Ascension Hill Lagro, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Friday, December 28, 2001 at the Holy Cross Memorial Park, Novaliches, after the 10:00 AM Holy Mass.

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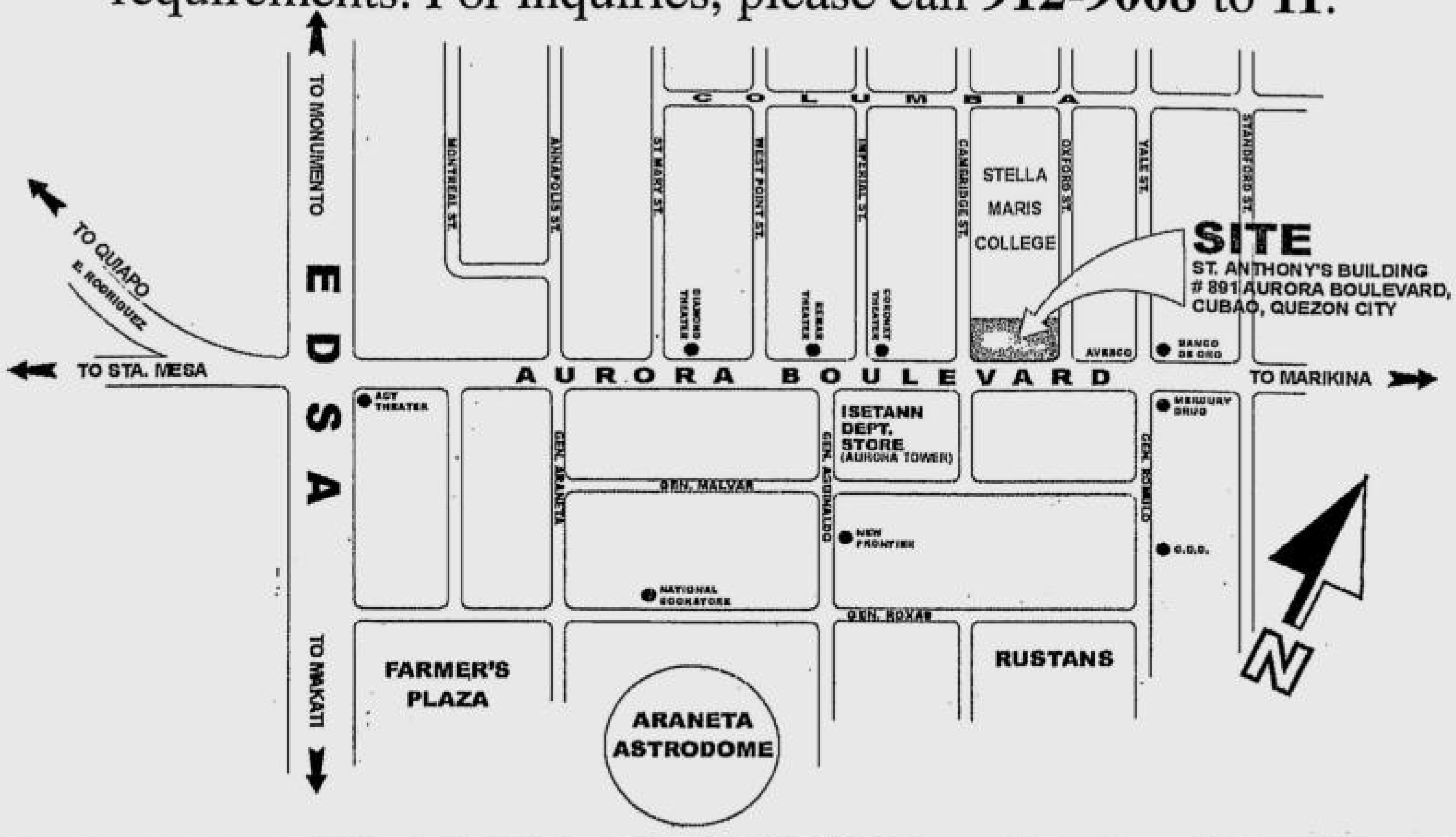

REPUBLIKA NG PILIPINAS
Pambansang Korporasyon Sa Elektrisidad
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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID
AD NO. PD 2001-65

Bidding Date: January 24, 2002 - 10:00 AM
Pre-bid Conference: January 18, 2002 - 2:00 PM
(NPC Fiesta Hall Conference Room)

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Schedule III	**- Power Management Center and Auxiliary Bldg.**
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Interested parties are invited to apply for eligibility and to submit sealed bids on the above to be opened publicly at the NPC Fiesta Hall, Conference Room, NPC-OBC, Quezon Avenue cor. Agham Road, Diliman, Quezon City.

Eligibility forms/documents are available on **January 2-4, 2002** at the Accreditation, Bidding and IT Services, Materials Management Department, Ground Floor, Bldg. 2 upon payment of P500.00 which is non-refundable. Last day of submission of application for eligibility forms/documents is on **January 10, 2002.**

Issuance of eligibility forms/documents mornings only, 8:30 to 11:30 AM. For inquiries please call No. 921-25-74.

The Corporation reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, waive any defect therein and accept the offer most advantageous to the Corporation.

PBAC-JANITORIAL/LANDSCAPE & INDOOR PLANTS MAINTENANCE SERVICES
NPC-OBC (Head Office)
Diliman, Quezon City

(PDI – Dec. 21 & 27, 2001)

MOTORING

CESAR D. MANGAWANG, Editor

Young mechanic preparing for Asean automotive tilt

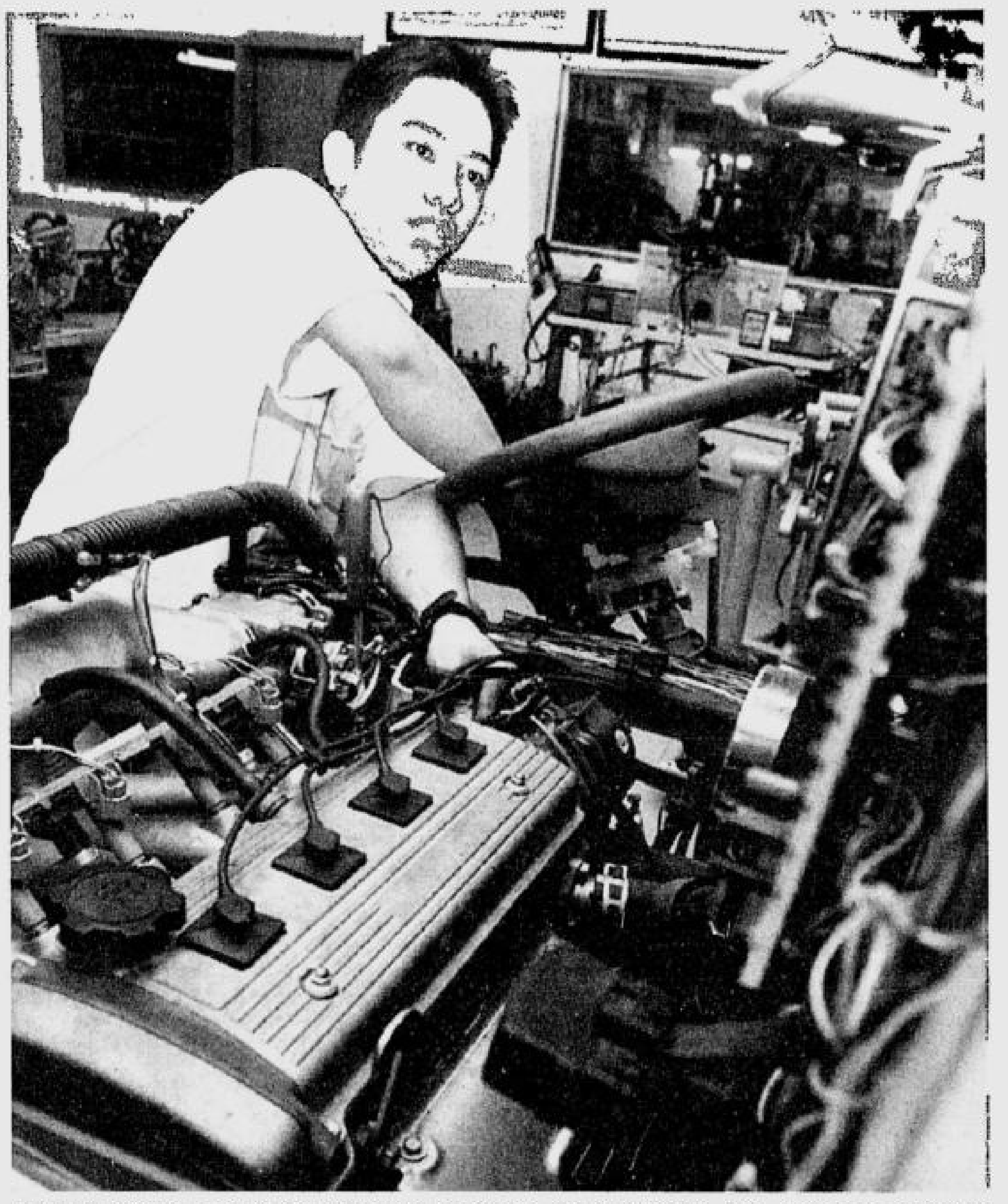
BY TESSA R. SALAZAR

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD Arman Dabbay always gets in trouble faster than guys his age do. But then, he gets out of it just as swiftly.

That's because Arman is already an accomplished automotive mechanic. And for that reason, once he finds the trouble with the engine and works on it, he ends up winning. Described by Guzman College of Science and Technology mentor Bong Taguba as a "fast learner," Arman recently bested 12 other auto mechanics in the Philippine National Skills competition in Davao.

He is expected to do the same when he competes with young technicians from Southeast Asian nations in November 2002.

Winning the Asean contest would mean automatic entry to the World Skills Competition of young automotive technicians. Arman's teachers are hoping that the Philippine government would support him, as this could bring honor to the country. Taguba also believes that Arman could prove once and for all that Asians' auto mechanic skills are not inferior to Western counterparts.



ARMAN studies one of the advanced platforms: the autotronics. The engine is a Corolla 4AFE model 2000 and was given by Toyota to the Guzman College of Science and Technology.

ERIK ARAZAS

"If Arman's training is good, even racial discrimination won't stop him from winning in world skills."

Winning the Asean competition would also mean cash rewards for Arman. Last year's Filipino contestant to Asean got P100,000 from the Philippine government, Taguba said. Arman's schooling is reinforced with on-the-job extensive sessions at the Toyota Cubao branch with trainer Hedwig Urfano.

Shorter course

Arman initially wanted to take up a four-year chemistry course. But his family's financial condition forced him to take a shorter two-year vocational course in auto mechanics. He believed he could help alleviate his family's financial condition if he got a job sooner. Arman's father is a taxi driver and his mother is a housewife. He has two other siblings working for minimum wages.

It seems, however, that he made the right academic move after all. Arman had won three competitions in two years. Inspired by these achievements, Arman plans to take a four-year course, Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education, as a scholar this coming June. He plans to teach after graduating.

If Arman wins the Asean contest, Taguba said Arman could become a full scholar for at least the last two years of his BSIE course. Arman was Toyota's scholar in his two-year automotive technician course.

8 troubles or more

The Asean competition is tough, Arman's trainers expect. Contestants are not only required to run the engine trouble free, they should run it 100 percent efficiently. At least eight engine troubles will be implanted anywhere inside the vehicle—inside any of the tubes and hundreds of movable parts of the vehicle's engine.

Contestants are timed for their performance. But speed is not just the issue. The quality of the technician's work is graded based on international computations. Taguba said that they were waiting for the Asean test package to be issued by host Indonesia. The test package includes the engine specs that would be used in the Asean competition.

HE locates implanted troubles in this model engine that would not start.

ERIK ARAZAS

New Year expectations

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

AS the cataclysmic year draws to a close, here are two things that motorists can expect this New Year:

A 2-STEP INCREASE IN TOLL RATES. The Toll Regulatory Board (TRB) has approved a provisional two-step toll rates increase with the first increase taking effect on Jan. 1, 2001 and the second in June.

Anna Gamboa of Citra Metro Manila Tollways Corp. says that a toll rate increase is urgently needed to pay the debts Citra incurred to build the Skyway and rehab the at-grade level of the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX). Earlier this year, Citra filed a petition for a 200 percent toll increase and while the TRB is still conducting public hearings on Citra's petition, an interim 85 percent increase has been granted. For private car owners, this means that driving from Magallanes to Alabang or vice-versa via the SLEX will cost P33 one-way instead of the present P22.50. The Skyway toll will go up to P65 from P55. For commercial vehicles, trucks and buses, the increase is bigger.

Motorists can help stave off a 200 percent increase by joining the oppositors once the TRB resumes its hearings on Citra's petition after the holidays. Many homeowners' associations of the communities south of Makati are opposing Citra's petition. News of the impending toll rate increase has not created even a whisper of protest—not yet, anyway. Perhaps it's because many people are busy with their holiday activities or are out of town on vacation or are still full of Christmas goodwill.

FROM SUV TO AUV? The Board of Investments (BOI) has reportedly approved Honda Cars Philippines Inc.'s plan to introduce on the market an Asian utility vehicle (AUV) based on the CR-V's platform. This appears to confirm rumors that Honda has been gearing up to invade the hot-selling AUV market, competition in which propelled Toyota, Mitsubishi and Isuzu to No. 1, 2 and 3, respectively, in terms of total vehicle sales in the first 10 months of the year.

The current Honda CR-V, categorized as a compact sport utility vehicle (SUV), accommodates five passengers. If and when the all-new 2002 CR-V is converted to a 10-seater, it will be entitled to exemption from the excise tax per BOI rules and its price will accordingly go down to AUV price levels. But it doesn't necessarily follow that by adding more seating capacity, the CR-V would descend to the AUV category.

I noted that in his reply to my e-mailed query as to whether it's true that Honda is adapting the CR-V into an AUV, Honda's highest-ranking Filipino executive, Arnel Doria, never used the word "AUV." He replied, "Honda engineers developed a 10-seater vehicle based on the CR-V platform. Since CR-V is due for a model change, we have already submitted for registration to the BOI the new specifications, including the 10-seater CR-V. With the news of acceptance of our registration, we now have more elbow room to plan for the coming new CR-V; i.e., we have the option to introduce 5-seater or 10-seater, depending on the government's direction."

That phrase, "depending on the government's direction," is fraught with meaning because the government has been vacillating about its own rule exempting 10-seater vehicles that are not 4WD from the excise tax. The manufacturers of AUVs, which enjoy this tax exemption, are fighting to retain it and have been winning so far.

Honda is watching the way the wind blows and keeping its options open. But it must make a decision soon, for the opportune time to launch the 2002 model CR-V is at hand. While Honda would sell more CR-Vs if its price is cut as a result of the 10-seater tax exemption, there is always the risk that the cash-strapped government, eager to improve its revenues, will suddenly rescind the tax privilege.

If Honda chooses the 10-seater option despite this risk, it will be turning the tables on competitors who have been loading their AUV models with luxe features such as automatic transmission, CD player, leather seats, body cladding, etc. to make them look like SUVs. Except for the 4x4 capability and bigger wheels, it's getting harder to tell an SUV from an AUV. Now here comes Honda threatening to convert its million-peso 5-seater SUV into an affordable 10-seater vehicle.

Will the Comfortable Runabout Vehicle remain a CR-V or will it become an Affordable Reengineered Vehicle (AR-V)? Whatever the nomenclature, it's hard to imagine the CR-V as an AUV and Honda probably knows it. Happy New Year!

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: Cigar smokers appreciate a great butt.

* * *

E-mail comments to aida_sevilla@pacific.net.ph

Have yourself a stress-free new year

BY RAYMOND B. TRIBDINO
Contributor

IT'S Christmas Day and I am here at the INQUIRER. No hassle really. It was a balmy, impossibly fast 20-minute drive from Tandang Sora to Makati so I have no complaint.

Just the other day, when Santa Claus was coming to town, things weren't as peachy. Yes, he brought gifts and toys and other Christmas joys but he also gave lots of parking woes, flaring tempers and all sorts of traffic jams.

Before Christmas, what was a two-hour trip from Novaliches to Makati took as long as four hours one way during peak moments. What used to be a normally breezy drive from Calamba in Laguna to Alabang became tainted with pools of cars waiting to exit at Sta. Rosa, Carmona and Biñan. And I was better off walking around the Greenbelt area leaving my car at the office a kilometer away. Otherwise I would have waited for Epiphany to find a place to park.

To keep my cool, my wife kept reminding me that Christmas is a time for merriment, not for petty squabbles over who got to the parking slot first. She said it is a time for giving, not for nosing each other out at the intersection of A. Arnaiz and Makati Avenue. Then I realized Christmas is a time for peace, not for exchanging expletives, dagger stares and upright middle fingers.

Now that Santa's gone back to the North Pole, you think your problems are over? Guess again. Traditionally, the days **after** Christmas are similarly traffic prone, especially in areas like the malls, expressways and connecting provincial roads.

Want a stress-free post-Christmas drive? Here's what we suggest.

Keep your expectations low—Don't depend entirely on the traffic news you hear on the radio or read over your cellular phone. Chances are they will be inaccurate by a few minutes (a traffic jam of tremendous proportions can develop in exactly 90 seconds). Instead keep your expectations low. Learn to translate what the traffic reports say.

For instance, if traffic reports tell you that "Edsa from Cubao to Boni is green and go" expect "green" to mean the color of the season and "go" to mean "go home." If you are told that "traffic is light from Boni all the way to Ayala Avenue" you should understand this to mean the traffic light is working but that does nothing to keep the traffic moving.

Make sure that you also apply the same to your fellow drivers. Bus and jeepney drivers will be nastier than ever, because there was no Christmas basket and a hefty boundary to pay.

Similarly, taxi drivers will defend lane with life and liberty because the MMDA will be out hunting for violators of the taxi ordinance.

Even private motorists will be a bit more reactive than usual. You would too if you spend two hours driving to SM, an hour finding a parking slot, two hours looking for a lousy ceramic vase and another hour queuing to pay for it.

By keeping your expectations low you won't get any more surprises.

Know the trouble spots—By the time this piece sees print, most schools and offices are still be on vacation, relieving some stress in known traffic trouble spot areas like Pasay Road, Greenhills Avenue and Ortigas Center.

At around Jan. 2 up to the 4th, traffic will be concentrated along the NLEX and SLEX and parts in between. Those living in the provinces, myself included, will have a hell of a time getting a bus ride home and most Metro Manila buses will shed off their urban clothing and go *colorum* for a few days a week (mostly at night.)

It won't be an easy job for our traffic managers to declog these congested areas, so be patient.

Finally, please be extra wary of nighttime driving, especially after the New Year parties. Drunk drivers will be aplenty, as well as inebriated and oftentimes rowdy individuals hurling firecrackers. When faced with such disturbances, yield.

Leave your car behind—If you could bear not having a car for a few hours, do so. Consider it your gift of traffic reduction, consequently for the betterment of humanity. The MRT, LRT, car pools, rented shuttle FXs and taxi reservations are your ticket out of the traffic mess.

If you need to buy small stuff, easily carried in a knapsack or duffel bag, then the MRT or LRT is the way to go. You could leave your car at a friend's house near the MRT. You could then ride off to SM, Crossing-Shangri-La, Robinsons and some similarly accessible place to do what you do for the season. If you can't bear the 10 flights of stairs up the MRT, consider a car pool with friends or even prearranging being fetched by a shuttle at their terminal at a designated time.

Stay home—The best way to stay out of the traffic mess and the trouble it brings is to stay home. If you are trying to escape pesky *inaanaks* (godchildren), pretend you are out of the country or come up with some suitable airtight excuse.

Let's all have a happy rage-free, stress-free new year!

LYNX Ghia

An encore Lynx Ghia

BY CHARLES E. BUBAN

YOU may have heard the many fine reviews for the Lynx Ghia, a 1.6 DOHC 16V inline-4 sedan Ford introduced locally a couple of months ago. This is just an addendum to the car's rather fine performance during our trip to Tagaytay Highlands and Naic in Cavite.

It's rather a blessing for us that we got an automatic variant of the Lynx Ghia. It's the right car to drive in traffic since a manual could numb your legs and hands from ceaseless stop-and-go movement. Besides, condition along the Aguinaldo Highway just after exiting the Coastal Road up to the Dasmariñas area is so ghastly you need to reserve some strength for the long drive that follows afterward going to Tagaytay (or just about anywhere for that matter).

For a 1.6 automatic, Ford Lynx accelerates rather quickly. You need this in order to outsmart other cars and even buses for better lane positioning in cramped highways. The down and up shifts are seamless. The only thing we were more concerned about was getting familiar with the car's gearbox as we had to glance down at the "PRND21" once in a while just to make sure we were already shifted to D and not neutral or reverse.

As for the comforts of the ride, the Lynx Ghia leather seats and door trims are pampering. The upholstery is just what you need during the long hours of wait for the traffic to move on.

Even the 6-speaker audio system was an endearing companion that let's you forget about the traffic mess outside. Credit goes to the two A-pillar tweeters added to both front doors that further enhance the quality of sound from the four-channel high power AM/FM stereo or its full logic cassette or the 12-disc CD player.

Christmas treat for Lynx buyers

Incidentally, for those who want a Lynx Ghia, this month is the right time to buy as Ford is giving buyers a special Christmas offer. For only P150,000 down payment, you can avail of a Lynx Ghia at monthly payments of P25,625 for the automatic transmission and P24,167 for the manual variant.

Through Ford Credit buyers can also avail of the innovative G-financing scheme that lets you start with a low down payment of only P125,000. Monthly payments begin at P14,295 on the first year. The graduated payment scheme allows customers to increase or adjust monthly payments annually. It is set up to make the first year's monthly payment easy and gradually increases payments as customers step up in life.

Apart from this, Ford is also continuing to offer its 90-days-pay-later scheme, which is available in 36- and 48-month terms. Other financial schemes are also available while cash buyers await special incentives.

Customers will also receive their units with a full tank of gasoline, compliments of the delivering Ford dealer. The Lynx Ghia is currently priced at P730,000 for the manual transmission and P765,000 for the automatic.

Most hardworking SUV offers very practical scheme

WANT to own an SUV without the added headaches of paying interest? Why don't you set your sights on the Musso Sport Select? The most hardworking SUV in the country now offers the most practical scheme for today's times with The Musso Zero Interest Extreme.

The Musso is currently available through a 12-month payment term minus the usual interest charges. Under this scheme, the Musso's suggested retail price of P1,297,950 can easily be affordable through an initial 50 percent down payment of P648,975 and monthly payment of P54,081.25 for 12 months.

But this doesn't mean you'll be getting less of the Musso. The Musso Zero Interest Extreme guarantees that you get the same Musso with all standard amenities intact, including the economical Mercedes-Benz 2.3 Turbodiesel Intercooler engine, remote keyless entry, all power appointments, high-impact bullbars, European style front grill and luggage rack on top plus a snazzy pair of running boards and body protectors on the sides.

The Musso Zero Interest Extreme. Has anything so attractive been so within reach?

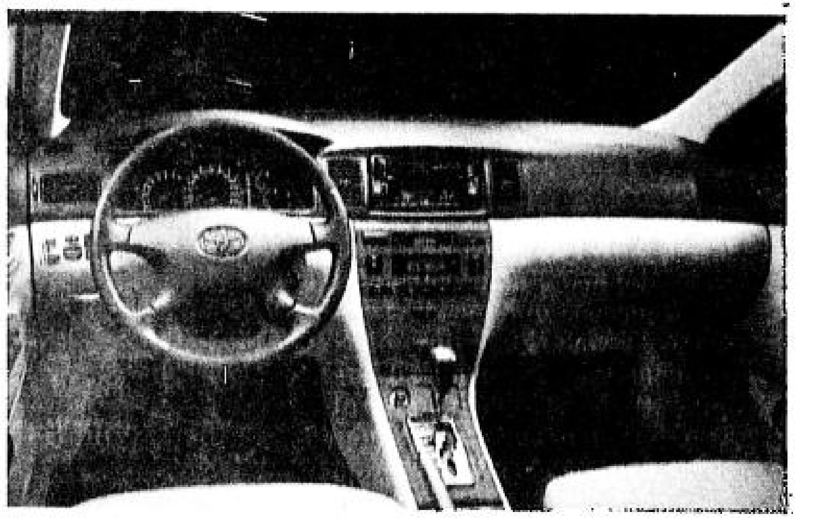
For inquiries on the 0 percent interest financing plan, please visit Commercial Motors Corp., its branches, or any of its authorized dealers or call Tel. No. 641-2286.

TOYOTA COROLLA ALTIS 1.6

Trusted with good reason

BY TESSA R. SALAZAR AND RAYMOND B. TRIBDINO,
Contributor

TOYOTA Corolla Altis 1.6



CONTROL layout isn't too smart but is well organized

BRAD Pitt shakes his bon-bon and for good reason. He drives a Corolla in that dizzying MTVish television ad for the latest transformation of one of the world's most trusted cars. Even if it was never at the cutting edge of technology and styling, the Corolla has earned a reputation for reliable, durable and comfortable transportation.

And after waiting patiently in an extra long queue of test drivers, we finally got our hands on the new Corolla and discovered why Brad Pitt was constantly squirming his way out of his meetings to get on board Toyota's latest recreation of its most popular sedan.

Cabin wizardry

Raymond: Cabin wizardry best describes how Toyota engineers squeezed out maximum passenger space from the compact sedan. Flattening the floor, rounding the roof, pushing the engine forward and raising the trunk resulted in massive passenger room without sacrificing trunk space and cabin rigidity.

Tessa: Not all will agree but we found there are tons of space for legs and heads. Long-legged travelers can go smiling on rush hour traffic jams. All these squeezed inside the Altis curve.

Raymond: But there is a trade off here. The taller belt line and wider "C" pillars reduce visibility while the drooping front end provides no visual reference of where the nose is. Backing up into a tight parking space requires some recalculating. While normal driving in traffic needs some reorientation. This is a little inconvenience though, nothing a smart driver can relearn in a few moments practicing parallel parking.

New fabric patterns for 2001 provide a refreshing respite from the dull designs of previous cars. Generally however, it is similar to the competition in terms of standard features and amenities.

Tessa: Features and amenities are plain. The sun visors are thin. There's only one light at the middle, nothing for the driver and the front passenger. There's also no light indicator for the key, and no sidelights on the lower portion of the car while you alight the Altis. The one we test-drove has a supersensitive honk, it isn't a keyless entry and we didn't find an alarm.

Raymond: Following the youthful exuberance of the Echo, the Corolla sports a similarly curvy dashboard with the usual standard tachometer and speedometer cluster. The easier-to-read and larger typeface together with the disappearance of the clutter from smaller gauges makes the instrumentation friendlier.

Control layout isn't too smart but is well organized. The in-dash CD/AM-FM radio remains to be at the top of the dash. And in keeping with the trend of the times for compact cars, a generous number of cupholders, storage boxes and a center-console with a lidded bin are provided for convenience.

Tessa: The car's endowed with small, medium and large storage spaces. Scatterbrain motorists won't have a hard time with small but significant personal effects.

Raymond: Rear stowage space seems larger than usual (two huge Echolac traveling suitcases fit snugly with space left for three knapsacks) with the wide lid opening right down to bumper level for easy loading. The trunk release was, however, a bit notchy to operate.

Attention grabber?

Raymond: Although most will say that the new Corolla's shape is radical and different, there are those who comment that it is a conservative and clean design that doesn't attract much attention. So what is it?

Tessa: It's not much of an attention grabber. It's not radically different, I don't know why. You tell me.

Raymond: Compared with the previous generation car, this indeed is a nicely proportioned and radical design closer to the high-end Lexus line. Considering two generations ago the Corolla was squarish and rather bland (like the boxy Mazda 323 says some quarters), the evolution to the trim and efficient shape of the 2001 Corolla is indeed welcome.

Aside from the all-new body shape, exterior details like the new front fascia with four-beam halogen headlamps, some chrome-plated trim, and restyled rear lamps create a goodlooking machine. Not an attention-grabbing stunner, but a well-behaved introvert performing well every time.

116 horses for kicks

Raymond: The peaky 1.6-liter engine provides 116 hp and 160 Nm of torque. Redline is just above 6,000 rpm. Come to think of it, that's a lot of 16s. There is Toyota's variable valve timing (VVTi) technology to play around with. The engine offers a strong low-end torque to propel you away from the traffic light.

Tessa: At 1.6 liter and a manual transmission at that, it did shoot up like a bullet ala Brad Pitt on traffic jam. It's smooth and powerful while ascending on highway bridges and elevated roads.

Raymond: Comparatively the engine is surprisingly quiet under hard acceleration and purrs at idling and cruising speeds. At about 3,000 rpm though, there is an annoying intrusive resonance.

Brake and gas pedals are responsive but seem to be placed too close to each other (hmm...the better for heel-and-toe?). The clutch is a bit too low and has too little feel to it. The brakes are spot-on though and judged by class standards, the Corolla handles extremely well.

Power-assisted steering is light (much too light) but precise. And the long wheelbase makes for a smooth cruiser and stability when cornering. There is little body roll and nothing short of the deepest ruts and widest potholes will disturb its passengers. Those rumble strips near the Skyway's Exit A go unnoticed except for the noise it makes.

In conclusion

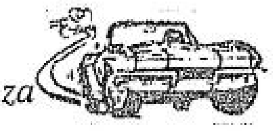
The 2001 1.6-liter Corolla Altis definitely delivers on its promises. Ride and handling are better than expected. And styling is refreshing and new. Overall, it provides the perfect "next step" to the Corolla's unfolding and reinforces the trust and confidence the large bulk of Filipino car buyers have for this car.

Despite being consistently booted out by the Civic in sales, the Corolla is never far away. It is trusted for good reason. Reason enough for it to get a **9 out of 10 total points.** Though not flawless, there are not enough arguments against it, and with such good value attached to it, how can it ever fail?

Don't be deceived by looks, buddies

FULL TANK

Al S. Mendoza



THE TROUBLE with owning a Volvo is, you are tempted to contribute to the nation's unemployment problem.

Surprised?

Don't even think about it, buddies.

You try driving the Volvo S80 and chances are your next move is to dump your driver. For good. That is, if you have a driver.

* * *

The Volvo S80 is not handsome by Filipino standards. But I have never been a believer in looks. As always, to me, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. Never skin-deep. What's inside the Volvo S80 matters. Exterior looks must never be the ultimate barometer in judging a car's worth. Fancy things never fascinate me.

Inside the Volvo S80 are leather seats so handsome you feel like going to sleep when seated either on the passenger side or at the back with the car barely starting.

In the inner sanctum of the car is an engine so powerful and yet, it merely purrs even at top speed.

Bravo to the Volvo, the dream car of my boss, Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc.

Mine, too.

Ah, when will I win that lotto jackpot?

* * *

Speaking of Volvo, do you know that Lyn O. Manalangsang is a nurse by profession?

Lyn, Volvo's fastest rising executive, had just passed the board when suddenly, she decided on a career switch.

"My parents were surprised of course," said Lyn, who earned her nursing degree from St. Luke's. "But then, I gave it a try and then, one thing led to another."

She first worked at Volvo's customer relations before going full-time as public affairs practitioner and marketing strategist for the Swedish-made car.

Of course it helps that the statuesque Lyn, who used to be a ramp model, speaks fluent English and is very articulate.

* * *

Here's good news for Kia lovers. And this one's from a friend I can't refuse. ***Pasko naman tayo ngayon!***

The Kia Motors and Columbian Autocar Corp. have not stopped "souping up" the Pregio series for 2001 with another entertainment feature: An on-board VCD player with color television.

The ceiling-mounted unit is designed by Audiovox, a leading US manufacturer of miniaturized audio and video systems for vehicles, and has a flush, custom-built look and a dash-mounted VCD console as well as a remote control.

TV reception is captured by an antenna system cleverly embedded around the windshield edges for clear reception everywhere the Pregio goes. Picture clarity is so good that even the last row passengers have no problem watching their favorite telenovela or game show on the road. The VCD system also accepts a playstation, videoke or VHS components that are 12-volt-powered.

The Audiovox system retails at a bargain: P40,000. The Pregio Festival costs P730,000 only. Added features include four new body colors, new wheel covers and rear garnish trim, enhancing the already outstanding value of the Pregio in today's van market.

* * *

I worked during the holidays and, my oh my, what a relief. Never had it so good driving from home to office and back. It was like Good Friday again. It was like All Saints' Day again.

* * *

QUOTE ME. Avoid opening your radiator cap regularly. It can quicken wear and tear to your radiator.

HOLLYWOOD MAKES JAGUAR THE STAR
Jaguar Cars transported the stars of the film "51st State" to its London premiere in a fleet of Jaguar X-Types to celebrate the Hollywood connection with Samuel L. Jackson sporting a kilt, finding the Jaguar XJR100 fitting for his attire. Jackson enjoyed some enviable car chases on the streets of Liverpool in a classic Jaguar XJ6 Series III with costar Robert Carlyle.

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4.5B LITERS A DAY BY 2004

ADB funding to avert water crisis

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE ASIAN Development Bank has agreed to finance at least three projects meant to augment Metro Manila's water supply and prevent a water crisis from crippling the country's capital region by 2004.

Documents obtained by the Inquirer showed that the ADB had agreed to provide money to allow the MWSS to start the Wawa river water supply project, Marikina northeast water supply project and the Angat utilization and aqueduct improvement project.

The Manila-based ADB will provide the MWSS with some P300 million in financial assistance for the initial phases of these projects covering technical and feasibility studies.

The three projects are slated to take off in 2003 in time for a water supply shortage that analysts predict will hit Metro Manila in 2004.

The P700-million Wawa river water supply project alone is expected to deliver some 50 million liters of water per day,

According to the MWSS' estimates, Metro Manila and provinces south of the capital region will need between 4 billion to 4.5 billion liters of water per day by 2004 that current sources will be unable to provide.

The Wawa river water supply project is expected to meet the needs of San Mateo, Mangahan and Rodriguez towns in Rizal. The MWSS hopes to complete the project, which includes the construction of a treatment plant, a reservoir and water conveyance pipes, by mid-2004.

The viability of the P2.9-billion Angat utilization and aqueduct improvement project will be confirmed before the end of the year, according to the MWSS. In the event that this project fails to get clearance, the MWSS will consider the Marikina northeast project as an alternative.

Another important water project is the Laguna Lake bulk water supply project, which will provide 300 million liters per day in southern Metro Manila.

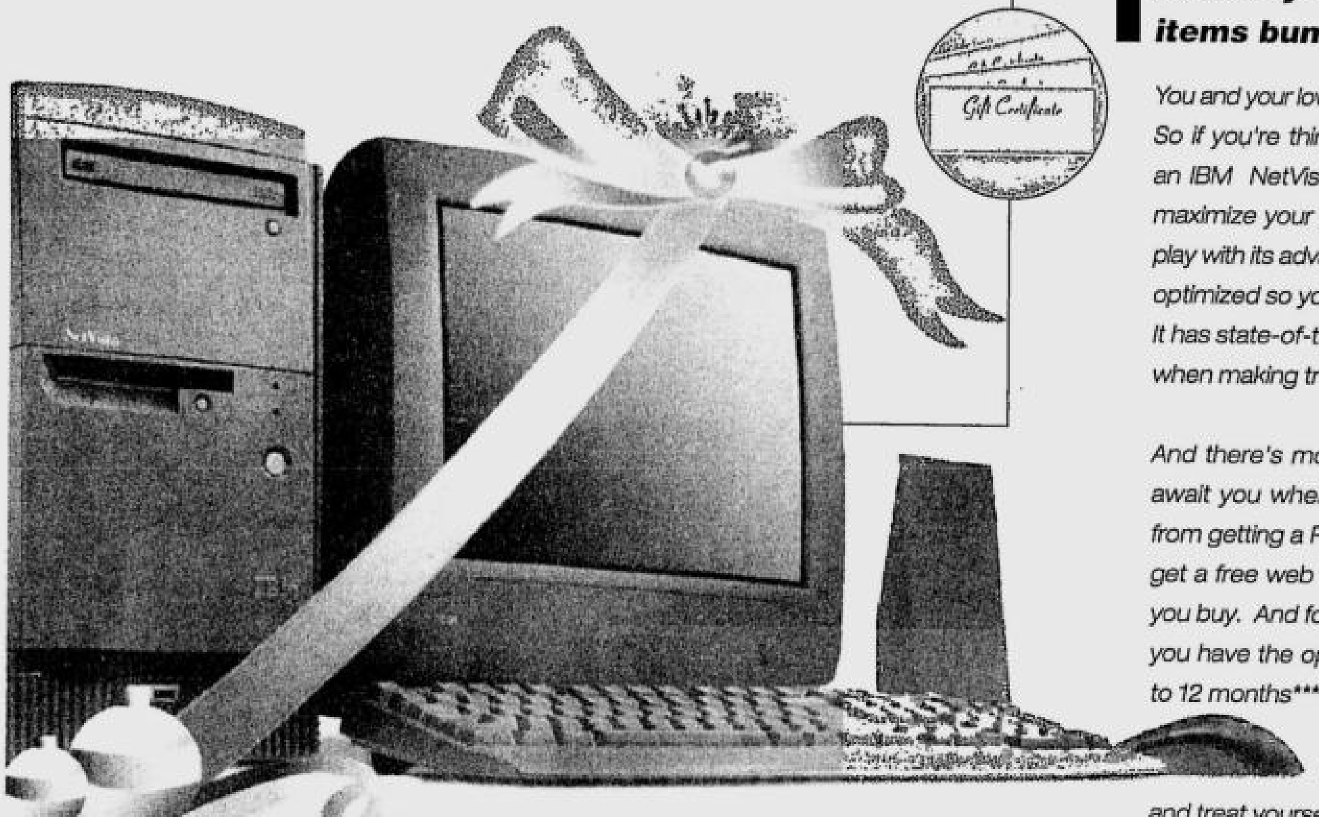
Maynilad Water Services Inc. is seen benefiting from this project, which the MWSS has not opened up for auction to private contractors.

The National Economic and Development Authority initially turned down the Laguna Lake bulk water supply project and directed the MWSS to look for other sources since tapping the lake would entail higher environmental and production costs.

Over 20 foreign firms had expressed interest in carrying out the Laguna Lake water project, according to MWSS documents.

The MWSS is also lining up the Laiban dam water supply project in Bulacan, but this one will entail a cost of around $1 billion to $1.5 billion.

Neda has yet to evaluate and endorse these projects.



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Psalm plans to acquire Enron contract

By Ronnel W. Domingo

ENERGY Secretary Vicente Perez Jr. said last week that the government was open to buying out independent power producer Enron Power Corp. Philippines' contract with National Power Corp. if it would offer a discount of more than 12 percent.

Perez said in an interview that negotiations were in progress between Enron and the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. He said that if an agreement would be reached, Enron's two power plants would be among Napocor's assets that will be sold next year.

Enron has two oil-fired power plants in the country such as the 108-megawatt Subic plant in Zambales and the 105-mw Pinamucan plant in Batangas.

"Assuming that Enron is reasonable in its asking price, a deal may be forged within the week," the secretary said.

Perez also said that Psalm has readied a financing package for the possible buy-out.

Enron's built-operate-transfer contract with Napocor covering the Batangas plant will lapse in July 2003 while that in Zambales will expire in March 2009.

The two power plants have an estimated combined cost of $250 million.

Early this month, Enron's United States-based parent company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, which allowed it to remain in control of its business while negotiating with creditors.

In an earlier interview, Perez said that prior to the firm's filing for bankruptcy, Enron has asked Napocor or Psalm to buy out its contract.

"In our opinion, the events have gone more in favor of Psalm or Napocor. Negotiations have been ongoing and it's a matter of finding an acceptable discount rate," Perez said.

He added that the government was not under any obligation to acquire the contracts.

"But if (Enron) is prepared to offer an attractive discount rate—to discount the future cash flow that it expects to receive from Napocor—then we are prepared to negotiate with them," the secretary said.

He said that the IPP initially offered a 12-percent discount rate but that the government asked for a higher discount.

Guoco in debt restructuring talks with PNB

FINANCIAL services firm Guoco Holdings (Philippines) Inc. yesterday said that it was holding talks with the Philippine National Bank (PNB) over the restructuring of an outstanding loan.

Earlier reports said that GHPI was working on the restructuring of its P900-million loan from PNB after successfully completing separate debt talks with United Coconut Planters Bank and Banco de Oro.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, it said:

"We confirm that there are ongoing negotiations between GHPI and the PNB covering various restructuring options to settle GHPI's outstanding obligation to PNB."

It did not give any details of the restructuring options nor the amount involved. *Reuters*

BIR's voluntary assessment scheme ends on Dec. 28

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue (BIR) is giving taxpayers up to Dec. 28 to avail themselves of the agency's Voluntary Assessment Program.

BIR Commissioner Rene G. Bañez said the program, contained in Revenue Regulations 8-2001 as amended by Revenue Regulations 10-2001, put program participants in the BIR's least priority for audit and investigation purposes.

It also allows taxpayers a flexible mode of tax payment through installment provided the amount involved is over P5 million.

If the VAP amount is over P5 million but not more than P10 million, 50 percent of the amount may be paid at the time of the filing of the application and the other 50 percent can be paid one month later.

However, if the amount exceeds P10 million, payment may be done in three equal monthly installments, 33.33 percent of the total amount at the time of filing of the VAP application and 33.33 percent monthly in the succeeding two months.

Bañez is optimistic that through the VAP, which is one of the bureau's revenue enhancement measures, the BIR will be able to attain its objectives of maximizing revenue collection, encouraging voluntary compliance as well as maintaining harmonious relationship with taxpayers with less inconvenience relative to investigation.

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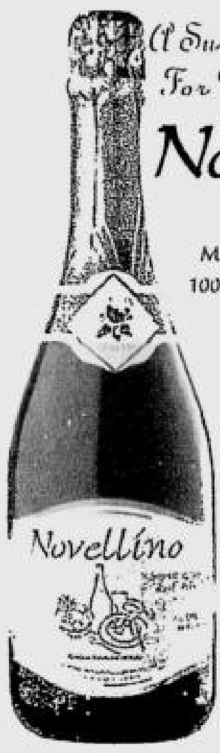
Story on page C2



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Double paternity at Lolo Dad

IN GOOD TASTE

Doreen G. Fernandez

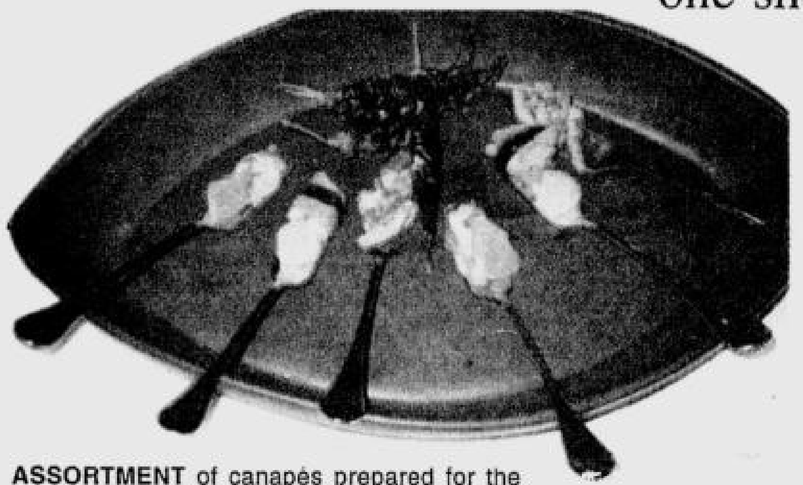
MICHELLE Ayuyao at 10 called her grandfather Dodo, Lolo, but her parents called him Dad. Sensing therein a bond and a euphony, she eventually called him Lolo Dad, and thus gave a name to the restaurant established in his old home (899 President Quirino Ave., Malate, Manila; tel. 524-2295, 526-7151; fax 522-2940) by his grandchild Mia and her husband Ariel Miguel, the chef.

The restaurant is small, seating a maximum of 30, and chef Ariel admits to not having had formal training—just traveling, tasting, reading, working tastes and materials in his mind, imagination and intuition. His cuisine is straightforward Italian, French and Mediterranean, with occasional individual flourishes—or maybe one should say "tantrums," since a very successful appetizer is called Tantrums of Seared French Moulard Duck Foie Gras with Highland Greens, Poached Pear and Balsamic Emulsion.

At a recent dinner for the ladies of the International Wine and Food Society, his cousin Pia Lim persuaded him to try "Something Old, Something New, Some Fusion, Something Blue." And so he did: Asian Spiced Corella Pear filled with Blue Cheese Mousse and Port Wine Emulsion for dessert; a tiny memorable soup called Chilled Espresso of Curried Apple and Cucumber with Sour Cream Foam. This one made restaurateur Jacqui Alleje say: "This I could eat all day; this man really understands food."

GREEN salad with olives, feta cheese and foccacia

The cuisine at this Quirino Avenue café is straightforward Italian, French and Mediterranean, with occasional individual flourishes—or maybe one should say 'tantrums'



ASSORTMENT of canapés prepared for the International Wine and Food Society ladies

Unanimous applause greeted his entrée: Kumquat Glazed Muscovy Duck Breast and Sesame Duck Foie Gras on Chili-Pine Nut Pancake. Ummm.

From a state-of-the-art kitchen comes this bounty. Ariel designed it himself, brooking no compromises. He uses hot coals for grilling—nothing like the taste and aroma they impart—heated on the stove top, then transferred to his griller, with all the glazes and marinades alongside.

No compromises

Nor do he and Mia make compromises with the ingredients. "They source the materials themselves," marvels Butchie Lim Ayuyao, their mother, "and say, Mommy, anything inferior would taste different." And so it must be virgin olive oil, beautiful highland greens from a grower, Valhrona chocolate for desserts, coffee beans from Saudi Arabia, bay scallops, Parma ham, wheels of Parmesan, the best of everything.

SHERBET in a teapot with dry ice

Prices are on the high end, of course, but the quality they insist on demands those. They also argue that it is a small café, they live rent-free, and the best things in life are not always free.

Wander, then, through their creations of pleasure: appetizers like Warm Salad of Fresh Spinach and Woodland Mushrooms; oysters baked with *foie gras* or spinach (Florentine) or fresh; Cappuccino (or Espresso, in the small cup) of Creamed Tomato Soup with Poached Dumplings; Mozzarella Cheese Gratinated Spanish Onion Soup.

Yield to the seduction of such seafood as Salmon Steak with Warm Potato, Prosciutto and Arugula Pesto Salad; Seared Bay Scallops with Caviar; Sauteed Prawns with Tomato, Taperrade, and Almond Nut Rice Pilaf. Or to the call of meats like Pancetta-wrapped Beef Tenderloin; Herbs de Provençe Crusted Rack of Lamb on Pesto Risotto and Party Melted Garlic Slivers; Grilled Marinated Chicken with Cinnamon-Garlic Flavored Rice, Feta Cheese and Fresh Fruit Relish.

KUMQUAT-GLAZED Muscovy Duck Breast and Sesame Duck Foie Gras on Chili-Pine Nut Pancake

We could hardly believe the enchantment of Valhrona Chocolate Terrine with Warm Glazed Strawberries, Strawberry Ice Cream and Espresso Sauce. But we planned to return for it, and for the Rosemary and Thyme scented Creme Brulee with Macadamia Brittle Ice Cream.

Lolo Dad's Café is a journey of gastronomic experience and pleasure.

Holiday postscript

AT THE NEW Citibank Greenhills office on Missouri Street, our friend Marga Cunanan invited us to have refreshments. In a bank? In the middle of a banking morning? Yes, there was a little corner daintily laid out with food from Joy Lim's My Angel's Kitchen: dainty tea sandwiches, Melba toast and three spreads: sun-dried tomato and basil cheese, eggplants and tomatoes, and chicken pistachio paté. Great to start the morning.

Further inquiries showed that My Angel's Kitchen, named for Joy's little girls, is on the ground floor of Greenbelt Mall, Ayala Center, Makati (telefax 812-3638). It accepts food orders, catering and gift packaging (beeper 150-330066; tel. 723-8389).

Ask for a food list, and be tempted to order, as I was: bottled fish in olive oil, chili garlic *tinapa*, lemon garlic *tinapa*, lemon garlic *tuyo* (great!), spicy *tuyo*, *daing* in chili-garlic vinaigrette, Parmesan smoked *bangus* in lemon oil, hot or regular. Pasta sauces like Al Nero, *taba ng talangka* with roasted garlic, *dulong* Italiana. Savory products like *binagoongang santol*, Bicol Express and crispy *bangus* skins. Salad dressings, pickled products and bakery products (apple bars, Baklava imported from the Middle East, rum cake, cashew tulles, French apple bites and more).

Also home-cooked frozen deli items like Callos à la Madrileña, Lengua con Setas, homemade beef *tapa*, Spanish *chorizo* and *longganisas* from Alaminos, Pangasinan, Baguio, the Cagayan Valley, Malolos, Lucban, Cabanatuan, etc. And from the clean, clear waters of Sagay City, Negros Occidental, dried *guma-a*, boneless *danggit*, fish *tapa*, fresh *bangus* belly, *palad* flakes, and believe me, Fish Bone-Jurassic.

There are daily menus (telefax 812-3638; 723-8389), plus delivery around the Makati business district.

"Christmas brings forth so many tastes, so many flavors, so many gifts of land, sea and cooking talent.

Wining, dining and endless singing at 9501

BY TITA M. TRILLO
Contributor

THE SKYLINE of Bohol Avenue, QC, has changed with the new ABS-CBN Building jutting out and reaching out to the sky,

The elegant dining club for members only on the 14th floor, called 9501, affords a breathtaking 180-degree view of the metropolis. The beautifully decorated restaurant, with its fine wood paneling, plush velvet, modern steel and glass interiors, is highlighted by contemporary Filipino artworks.

Myrna Segismundo, the epitome of a Filipino well-traveled gourmand, surprised us with a sumptuous dinner, combining continental cuisine with an Asian twist reminiscent of Vong in New York where French-Asian fusion started and all the rules of traditional classic French cuisine were broken.

Jeff Cook of Robert Mondavi flew in to grace the degustation dinner, and his expertise in choosing the wines truly complimented all of Myrna's choices of epicurean delights.

The event was a casual gathering of members of the press, hoteliers, restaurateurs, representatives from the USDA, and executives of ABS-CBN and Anthony's Wines and Spirits Corp.

Among the guests were Michaela Fenix, Elaine Sta. Maria, Myra Angeles, Chit Lijauco, Mary Ann and Claude Tayag, Freddie Pio de Roda, Mitos Araneta, Glenda Baretto, Tinee de Guzman, Mariano Garchitorena, Maribel del Rosario and Selina de Venecia.

GREAT array of appetizers

Lawrence Tan and Patricia Pauline Daza-Planas, both of ABS-CBN, proudly showed the guests around the club complex, which included a modern spa and imposing mini theater.

At the Chronicle Bar, we started with Triple Decker Pork Asado with oven-dried tomatoes and asparagus; Tartare of Tanguigue and Cucumber rolls; Goose Liver Pouches with *adobo*-balsamic glaze and pink peppercorns; Banana and Sesame Seed Skewers with Lox and Mascarpone with Fried Fish Roe and Nage of Sole Tinola with Pernod and saffron green papaya strands. All these teasers were downed with Robert Mondavi-Vichon Chardonnay, a wine with hints of topical fruits, citrus flavors and spice notes, and Robert Mondavi-Vichon Merlot, a wine with soft mouthfeel, with fruity flavors of cherry and spice.

At the upper main dining room we were led to a beautifully arranged table with fine china and impeccable glassware spruced with birds of paradise and tropical greens.

The degustation dinner started with Clam Chowder with pepper leaf pesto. Then came Roasted Stuffed Turkey with warm tamarind butter and chestnut glaze greens, which titillated our palates for its unique taste as opposed to the classic cranberry sauce. Michael Woolsey and Rowena Singian of the US Trade were undoubtedly surprised at these concoctions. We cleared our palate with Cranberry Sorbet as we headed for the most awaited prime course, Barbecued Lamb Cutlet, poached in guava and Robert Mondavi wine on a bed of wild rice risotto with grilled asparagus bundled on the side. It was so divine, especially when we paired it with Coastal Chardonnay, a white wine with vibrant fruit flavors and lively acidity, and Coastal Cabernet Sauvignon, a red wine with lingering finish and delicate nuances of spice intertwined with hints of vanilla that complimented the blending of ingredients from the East and West.

As the evening progressed, Jeff candidly related stories about Robert Mondavi, who at 90, indulged in a bottle of Napa Cabernet and managed to swim an hour each day.

The finale was held in the Lower Dining Level with an array of different desserts: coco-eggnog crème brulée; warm bread and mango pudding; *queso de bola* and *kesong puti* and a lot of tropical fresh fruits. The piéce de résistance is the Moscato d'Oro, a wine 100 percent made out of Muscat Canelli grapes, which were quickly hand-harvested and gently pressed to capture the grape's delicate character and minimize tannin.

We drunk so much Muscato, unaware that taking too much of this sweet wine could led to a euphoric high and endless singing.

See you at the next wine degustation.

MARIBEL del Rosario of Anthony's Wines & Spirits, Myrna Segismundo of Restaurant 9501, Tinee de Guzman of Shiraz, Patricia Daza-Planas of ABS-CBN and Freddie Pio de Roda

USDA agricultural attaché Michael Woolsey, Tinee de Guzman and Tita M. Trillo

JEFF Cook of Robert Mondavi and Selina de Venecia of Sun Microsystems Phils.

AN OPEN baking area shows customers how cinnamon rolls are prepared.

Whiffs of cinnamon in Greenhills

GOOD news to Greenhills' early risers, joggers, commuters and coffee crowd. Cinnzeo Bakery & Cinnamon Treasures recently opened an outlet at the ground floor of Madison Square, Ortigas Avenue (along the approach to La Salle, Xavier and Montessori Schools, and Greenhills shopping area).

The new Cinnzeo in Greenhills has the same open baking area that attracts cinnamon lovers to watch how Cinnarolls are meticulously prepared.

"Our customers' experience begins with their first whiff of cinnamon, and now, we have brought the same experience to Greenhills," says Bong Sarmiento, district manager for Cinnzeo Phils.

"The rolls are fresh-baked throughout the day and made of the Canadian finest wheat and the highest grade of cinnamon all imported from Canada. More than the stores' interiors, what's inside our cinnamon is what ultimately brings our customers back," adds Sarmiento.

Cinnzeo has also added more varieties of cold and hot coffee drinks, such as Coffee Toffee and the Frosted Mocha Soul, to complement Cinnaroll, Pecaroll and Chocoroll.

Concurrent with the Greenhills store openings, Cinnzeo is rolling out new Coconut Chocolate Decadent, a rich chocolate drink with a hint of the exotic tropical coconut, topped with whipped cream and toasted coconut sprinkles. Served hot or cold, the White Chocolate Symphony, on the other hand, is smooth white chocolate topped with whipped cream and embellished with white chocolate shaving.

Those who may want to enjoy their cinnamon rolls at home may opt for the convenient takeout packs. The rolls can be heated in a conventional oven or microwave.

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LE Club treasurer Jean-Pierre Gautier, Michel Hermelin and Le Club 1998-1999 president Louis-Paul Henssaff

LE Club president Roger Ferrari and French embassy cultural attaché Franck Hebert

RAMON Sy and Le Club director Jacques Dupasquier

PHOTOS: BETOY JOHNSON

Let the wine flow

FAITHFUL to tradition, Le Club, the French Business Association of the Phils., welcomed the arrival of Le Beaujolais Nouveau, vintage 2001 recently at the NBC Tent, Bonifacio Global City.

The 2-month-old wine flowed at the venue as Le Club extended the privilege to Manila's wine lovers and joined the rest of the world in celebrating this young wine. The group of merrymakers was exuberant and bubbly as they imbibed the wine, along with an array of the finest French delicacies and a remarkable selection of fine cheeses...

The rhythms that night came from the Spirit of '67. But beyond the toasts and revelry, Le Club and its members, through Le Beaujolais Nouveau, expressed their wish to foster closer ties with their Filipino counterparts and friends.

The Beaujolais Nouveau wine tradition started in France when the French government implemented guidelines that this new wine could only be released to the public on the third Thursday of November. It started out as a reward for the wine workers of the Beaujolais region, pouring out the wine barely fermented. Now people all over the world enjoy the fanfare associated with being among the first to partake of its taste.

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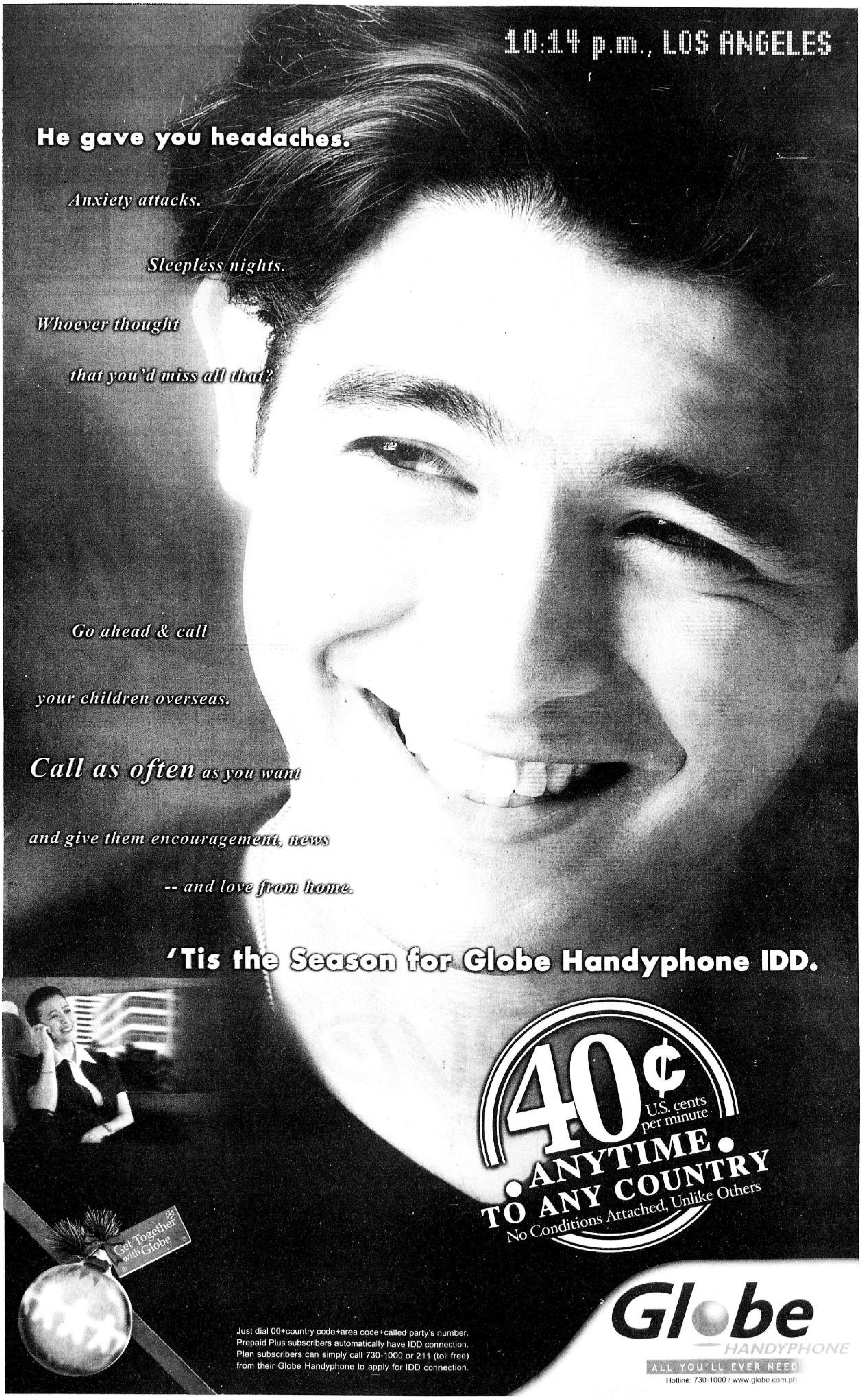
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